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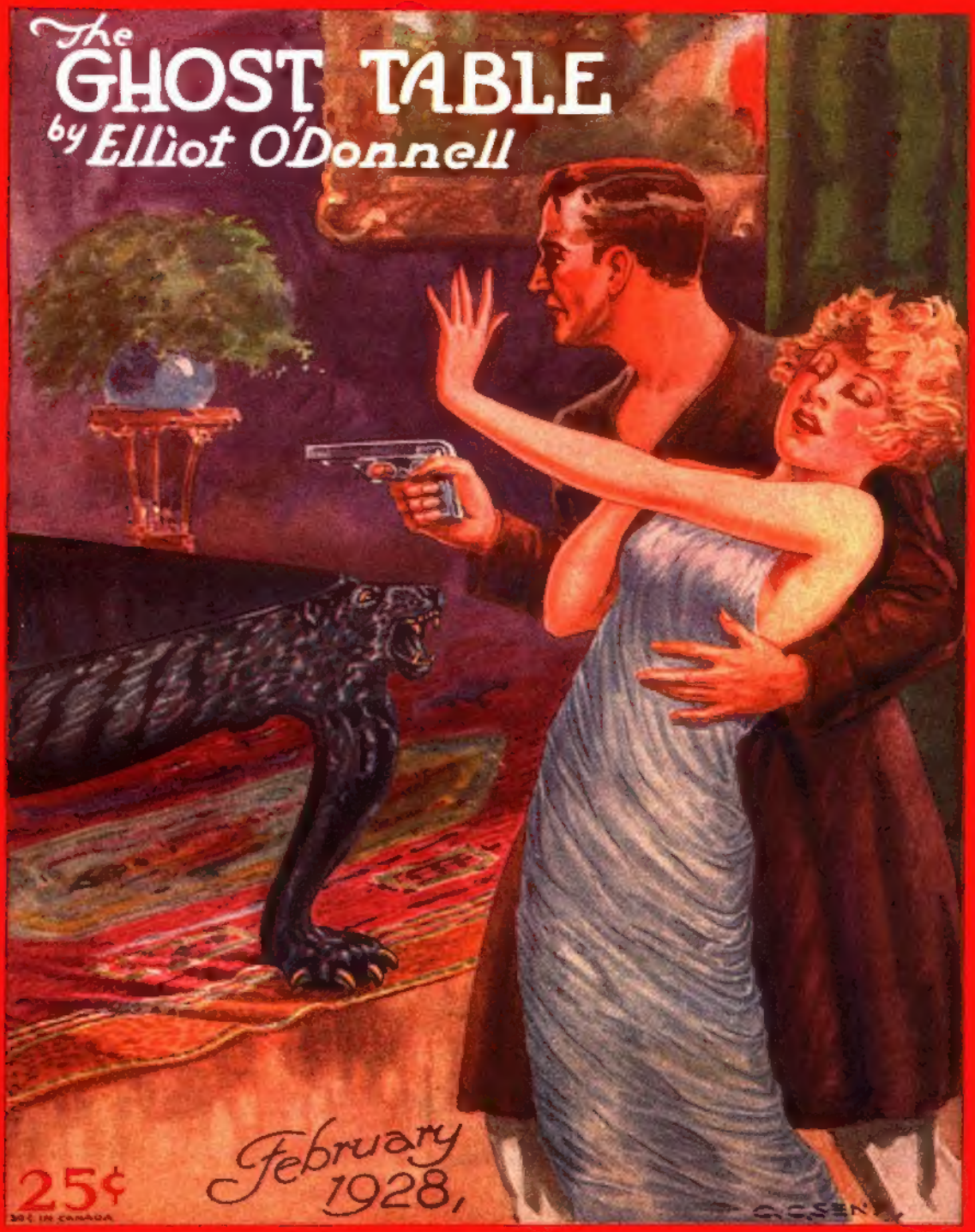

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME XI NUMBER 2

Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, $2.50 a year in the United States; $3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession.

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NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 450 East Ohio Street, Chicago, Ill. FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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Contents for February, 1928

Cover Design ..... **C. C. Senf**

Illustrating a scene in "The Ghost-Table"

The Ghost-Table ..... **Elliot O'Donnell** **149**

An exciting story of occult phenomena—a rampant beast, lusting to kill, was this table with the tiger-claws

The Call of Cthulhu ..... **H. P. Lovecraft** **159**

Slithering through the earth came the thoughts of Cthulhu, and mankind faced the rule of an obscene and incredible monstrosity

The Shadow on the Moor ..... **Stuart Strauss** **179**

A creepy tale of the pre-druidistic ruins of England—out on the moor were dancing, and strange wild music, and death

The Curse of Alabad, Ghinu and Aratza ..... **Wilfred B. Talman** **188**

"If she sinks, she is innocent, but if she floats, she is a witch and must die!"—a tale of old New York

[CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE]

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[CONTINUED FROM PRECEDING PAGE]

Mephistopheles and Company, Ltd. ..... **Seabury Quinn** **193**

Jules de Grandin rescues an Austrian girl from the fiendish grasp of a heartless devil-syndicate

The Purple Sea ..... **Frank Owen** **213**

Another exquisite Chinese fantasy, as full of color as was "The Wind That Tramps the World"

The Giant World (Part 2) ..... **Ray Cummings** **221**

A three-part weird-scientific serial—a distant world—giants growing into largeness unfathomable—gooseflesh adventures

The Three Witches ..... **Ernest Dowson** **236**

Verse

The Isle of the Fairy Morgana ..... **John Martin Leahy** **237**

A cruel murder took place on Flang Island, hidden from the world, yet Guy Oxford saw every frightful detail of the murder

Folks Used to Believe:

The Barnacle Goose ..... **Alvin F. Harlow** **252**

One of the curious superstitions of our ancestors

The Mist Monster ..... **Granville S. Hoss** **253**

A weird mist billowed up from the cave—and horrible was the thing that it did

The Dream Snake ..... **Robert E. Howard** **257**

An eery snake story—an unusual tale—night by night the horror grew, until it completely enmeshed the doomed man

Weird Story Reprint

Clarimonde ..... **Theophile Gautier** **261**

"La Morte Amoureuse," the most exquisitely beautiful of all vampire tales, translated by Lafcadio Hearn

The Eyrie **282**

A chat with the readers.

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The GHOST-TABLE

by ELLIOT O'DONNELL

"Yvonne's nails sank into his arm, waking him very thoroughly."

YVONNE has the devil's own taste for the odd and curious, so that a gift truly pleasing to her involves an assault on my imagination more than on the bankroll. And, as usual, the day following was our wedding anniversary; time had once again slipped up on me, and I was totally unprepared to pay the day its honors in the shape of jade necklaces, Japanese lacquer, or other bit of grotesque loveliness wherewith she loved to adorn her person or our already crowded apartment. Heaven help us, but why couldn't the girl let a diamond tiara or a bucket of Burmese sapphires suffice, instead of craving outlandish trifles the pursuit of which always drives me at a pace just three jumps ahead of the madhouse?

I prowled about, stalking the perfect gift which would write another chapter on how to be happy with a woman of quaint tastes, and envying those fortunate lads whose problems were solved with cobra-skin shoes, or two ounces of silk and lace, or a new coupé. Despair prowled with me.

And then——

I never did know what heaven-sent hunch prompted me to enter that second-hand furniture store in whose farthest corner I recognized at a glance the perfect gift for Yvonne. Anyway, the longer I looked, the better I liked it. What a table! Long, narrow, low; its outlandish, foreign

lines carved in a dark wood whose dusky, soft luster reminded me of the deep richness of a pair of cordovan boots the old colonel used to wear when the Fifteenth paraded in Rizal.

"I knew you'd fancy it," exclaimed the shopman, as he removed its burden of books and dusted the top. "Only fifteen guineas. No veneer there; solid teak," he lied.

It wasn't teak; of that I was sure. It reminded me rather of that iron-hard and iron-heavy wood from Mindanao, more or less properly called Philippine ebony.

"Wonderful workmanship," continued the shopkeeper. "Look at those legs, sir."

They were wonderful: exquisitely fashioned, curving slightly outward and ending in feet fashioned to resemble the paws of a beast of prey—savage, pitiless claws whose realism made me for a moment wonder why the table was not confined in a cage.

More odd than the table itself was the heavy chain that secured one leg to a massive ring in the floor.

"Fifteen guineas," I reflected. Then, to the dealer: "What the devil! Do you chain it to keep it from walking away? For it's certainly too heavy to steal."

The dealer started, coughed, flushed. My remark had reminded him of what in his enthusiasm he had doubtless forgotten: that tables are not usually shackled to the floor.

"There were two or three attempts made to steal this very table from my window," he began, looking very foolish. "It's no end an attractive piece. And these collectors, you know—begging your pardon, sir, but you yourself might be tempted——"

Plainly the man was improvising. The poor fellow probably had persecution delusions, or something of the kind, and felt a bit wooden at having me notice the evidence thereof.

The more I looked at that table and its graceful, feline curves——

"Fifteen guineas? . . . How about ten, cash? And"—I paused, then shot it to him—"and how about a bill of sale with this curious table which has to be chained to the floor in the most obscure corner of your shop?"

That sunk him!

"Very good, sir. Yes, sir. And I can give you a bill of sale. I'm a reputable dealer, sir."

"Not so bad," I congratulated myself, as I left the shop with a bill of sale. "Perhaps it isn't stolen property; but there certainly is something wrong with its past . . . though I care not a hoot in a hailstorm," I concluded, as I pictured Yvonne's ecstasies at that pagan table with its savage claws, curiously carved legs, and catlike grace. If the personality of a piece of furniture could grow on me in such a short while, her temperamental majesty would undoubtedly be thrilled from her toenails to her eyebrows.

TRUE to his promise, the dealer delivered the table that very afternoon, shortly after I reached home and told Yvonne of my discovery. The lift as usual was out of order: so I was not surprized to note that the two men who brought the table to our apartment on the third floor were somewhat the worse for wear. They set it in the middle of the drawing-room as though it had been a red-hot rock, and edged away from it a pace or two.

"It's heavy as a battleship," I remarked, hefting it.

No wonder the men were exhausted; that massive table resisted my grip as though its claws had sunk into the floor. "Heavy as a battleship?" repeated one of the porters. "And that's only 'alf of it. Thank you, sir."

Pocketing the shilling I handed him, the porter and his companion departed, and seemed pleased at the opportunity. I rather wondered that they spared me the garrulity I might have expected of their efforts to fritter away ten minutes of their employer's time, delaying their return to the shop and further duty.

"Oh, Val, what a perfectly *mar*velous table! I never saw *any*thing like it——"

If I'd walked in with the pagoda of Shwei-dagon, she couldn't have been more enthusiastic. Her sister Annie, who was visiting us at the time, was equally pleased, though not quite so frenzied in her approval. I thoroughly enjoyed their comments on the table, feeling very much the *conquistador* displaying the plunder of a new world; and after the first five minutes of their fanfare of ecstasy, I wondered how I had ever in the presence of such beauty contrived to beat the price down five guineas . . . about twenty-five dollars, real money. And thus I gave little thought to the strange conduct of Goole, our collie, who, as the porters entered with the table, growled, and fled from the room, whining.

" 'Vonne, it's lovely . . . and so odd," remarked Annie, as Yvonne with a final caress broke away from me and set to work dusting the lustrous tabletop. "It's positively uncanny how anything of wood can be so lifelike. I'm almost afraid to turn my back to it."

"And Val calls *me* temperamental!" jeered Yvonne.

"But it does remind me of some beast of prey," insisted Annie. "Why, even the wood has leopard markings——"

"Stupid!" I protested; "leopards are spotted, not striped."

And then for the first time I noted that the top, when viewed from a certain angle, did have the faintest, shadowy suggestion of tiger stripes which very oddly gave it the appearance of having a slightly convex surface.

"You two will be the death of me!" laughed Yvonne. "Zebras are just as striped, and they're nothing but sport-model jackasses!"

And that settled the discussion.

THAT night, some time after we had gone to bed, Yvonne woke me . . . or thought she did.

"Did you hear that?" she whispered.

I had been hearing it for some time, and for some time had been wondering whether an unreasonable amount of Paul Whitby's Bacardi punch and three Patargas Coronas in a row could have made me hear that scarcely perceptible but persistent purring which had gradually become a dull thump-thump.

"Do I hear what?" I contrived to mutter sleepily.

"That awful thumping."

And Yvonne's nails sank into my arm, waking me very thoroughly. It was all rather disturbing. Things were becoming involved: for Yvonne hadn't smoked even one of those Patargas, and scarcely tasted that potent, aromatic punch; and she too was hearing what had now become the heavy tramping of a wooden colossus striving to tread stealthily across strange territory.

"Burglars!" she gasped. "Do go to the 'phone and call the police."

"Police be damned! By the time the operator makes the connection and I manage to say 'Are you there?' in the proper mumble, I'll be slugged and the house looted. Anyway, I think it's a pile-driver working on that building just around the corner——"

"You would!" sneered Yvonne. "Oh——"

Good Lord! I couldn't laugh that off: from the drawing-room came the sound of a regiment of cavalry

charging over a woodpile, which didn't inspire me to investigate before dawn.

"Maybe he was right about that table. Someone's trying to steal it——"

And that settled it: if I let anyone get away with Yvonne's precious table, life with her would be unbearable for years to come.

"Bunk!" I protested; and then piled out and dug a service .45 out of the dresser.

Goole's whines didn't add to my peace of mind.

But I slunk down the hall, by no means comforted by that crashing and clattering in the drawing-room, accented by the rattle of andirons and the tinkle of shattering glass. I hugged the wall, creeping through the darkness toward the riot. At the entrance of the drawing-room——

"Stick 'em up, and be quick about it!" I growled as savagely as my nerves permitted, and snapped on the light.

No one stuck 'em up. No one was there. The ensuing silence was all the more awful for having come out of such a terrific din.

I still don't know whether my relief exceeded my wonder: relief at not having to shoot it out against Lord knows what odds; and wonder at the dead, heavy silence that overwhelmed that fearful clattering and thumping the instant I snapped on the lights.

Goole whined dolorously at the farther end of the hall.

The furniture was a sight: chairs upset, the what-not thrown on the sofa with two of its legs broken, the fire irons scattered about on the hearth; and in one corner of the room, some distance from where we had placed it, was the newly purchased table. It seemed that someone had given it a terrific push which had sent it skating across the polished floor only to halt when a small Kurdish rug which lay in its path had become entangled with those fierce claws and brought it to a stop.

I shivered as I regarded that long, narrow, faintly banded and slightly convex top, and those out-curved legs and predatory claws glistening silkily under the drawing-room lights. It reminded me of some beast of prey poised to spring. And then I returned to tell Yvonne that all was clear as far as I could determine.

Yvonne was incredulous, and simply couldn't believe that the creators of the disturbance had vanished so mysteriously; but a search of the house convinced her. And then she followed me on my return to the drawing-room to view the battlefield. Still not entirely convinced of the departure of the intruders, she sought to take Goole with us. But Goole wisely took cover beneath our bed, all the while alternating snarls with terrified whines.

And then Annie, awakened by the height of the disturbance, finally ventured out of her room, joining us as we went to take another look at the upset drawing-room. She was entirely in favor of leaving the house and spending the rest of the night at a hotel.

"Don't be stupid," I chided. "I've searched the entire house and tried every door. There's not a sign of anyone's having entered or left." And, clutching at any opportunity to laugh it off, I continued, blaming the tumult on Yvonne's Angora cat: "Look! The window is slightly open. Probably Miggles was entertaining a few playmates, and escaped——"

"Now I'll tell one," retorted Annie. "Miggles would of course have moved that heavy table and wrapped a rug about its legs."

That should have finished me, but I came up for more, mentioning the heavy chains that had shackled the table to the floor of the furniture store.

"I will admit," I improvised, "that this may be one of those odd and precious pieces that some collector covets; and by terrorizing the dealer, he hopes to beat down the price . . . only I came along and crabbed the game, so I'm getting a taste of some collector's *schrechlichkeit*. . . ."

Rather good, what? I thought so; and Annie didn't argue. Yvonne was thrilled at the glittering notion. And with peace once more restored, we sought what little sleep could be salvaged from the remains of the night.

YVONNE spent a considerable portion of the following day in cleaning and polishing her prize; and when a number of her friends came in to tea, they went into raptures over it, especially over its feet and legs, which took their fancy enormously. Yvonne, strutting her table as though she herself had carved it, spoke of the faint tiger markings and the almost imperceptible convexity of the top; and then she abruptly changed the subject, for not a trace of either peculiarity was visible. Strange, very strange; but perhaps those oddities were brought out only by artificial light—those, and *other* oddities, I found myself thinking, in spite of myself.

"I can't believe those claws are wooden," remarked one of the ladies from Glebe Place, as she bent down to examine them. "So very lifelike, and so beautifully shaped, and so dreadfully sharp and cruel. One can imagine them tearing and rending one to pieces."

"How fantastic!"

Yvonne laughed. But I caught a troubled light in her eyes.

That night before going to bed we moved the table very carefully into one corner of the drawing-room, locked the door, and took out the key. Being very tired, we were soon asleep.

But my sleep was troubled. A solemn, deep-toned purring rolled in my ears, impressing itself on my sleep, and finally increasing to a pitch that woke me from my troubled half-sleep. Then, as before, came that dull thump-thump as of some wooden monster seeking to advance stealthily.

"Good Lord, again?" I groaned wearily.

And then——

A crashing, splintering, tinkling; the fearful screech of a small beast in mortal agony.

Annie burst into our room.

Again that scream of anguish.

And I repeated last night's ritual, slinking down the hall, pistol in hand. The floor and walls trembled under that horrible thumping and pounding; but I finally did set the key in place, turned it——

As I reached in for the switch, a terrific crash against the door-jamb nearly knocked me from my feet. I opened up with the .45; and at the same instant, with my left hand, found the switch.

Silence. Deathly, oppressive. The hard, seasoned edge of the table had sunk deep into the softer wood of the door-jamb. But this time no Kurdish rug was wrapped about the legs of the table. Those feet—beautifully carved feet with exquisite claws—gleamed bloodily; and beneath them, pounded to shreds, mashed into the floor by that hardwood beast of prey, was Miggles, the cat whose mortal screams had awakened me.

Poor little kitten! We'd locked her in with that awful table.

Yvonne passed out then and there. I carried her to our bedroom and, leaving Annie to apply a few restoratives, returned to patch up some semblance of order. Believe me or not, it did take a bit of nerve to return to that fiend-ridden drawing-room.

I had scarcely entered when there came a pounding on our door, and

someone demanding entrance in the name of the law, or the King, or whoever the appropriate person is on such occasions. A sergeant accompanied by a squad of police entered and took the situation in hand.

Most 'strawnary, he fancied, was such rioting at that hour of the night. Disturbing the peace, and all that, this discharging of firearms. And when I showed them the drawing-room, they registered amazement and proceeded to search the house thoroughly. However, finding nothing but some splintered furniture and the remains of a cat, the sergeant contented himself with taking notes on my pedigree for the past four generations, as well as the history of "the bloody tible" I'd blamed for the disturbance; and then, after accepting a shot of brandy and a one-pound note, he marched his squad from the scene of the mêlée.

But I knew the end was not in sight. The police had granted my right to open fire on an intruder at that hour of the night, even though that was a beastly hazardous habit; yet they knew that something, somewhere, was decidedly off-color; and I had reason to expect that for the next few weeks I'd be followed by mysterious strangers wherever I went, and the house kept under strict surveillance.

It was dawn before I restored order. Yvonne, having recovered sufficiently, assisted me; for, with the remains of Miggles disposed of, there was nothing to upset her nerves again, though she did eye that table apprehensively, and refused to turn her back to it. And I didn't blame her.

"Val," she finally remarked, "you must get rid of that table at once——"

"Absolutely!" I agreed.

"It's haunted. Burn it, or drop it in the Thames, or—poor little Miggles."

And Yvonne was in tears.

The long and short of it was that after sending Yvonne and Annie to spend a day or two in the country with their mother, I invited my friend Dr. Paul Whitby and his brother Mark to sit up all night in the flat with me. They came at about 10 that evening, and at 11 the three of us went into the drawing-room, seated ourselves on the sofa, switched off the lights, and waited for what I sensed would inevitably happen.

For some time we talked and laughed. Neither of my friends believed in supernatural manifestations; so that the idea of standing guard over a haunted table struck them as the height of absurdity. They candidly admitted that they were seeing the farce through to a finish only to please me. Perhaps if they'd seen the drawing-room before I cleaned it up, they'd not have been so skeptical.

Every now and then Mark would make some facetious remark at which Paul would laugh, and, responding with some *bon mot* of his own, would in return draw a snort from Mark. After about half an hour of it, however, Mark began to yawn; and I think they both were more than half asleep when the hall clock struck midnight.

Then there came a most intense silence, a clinging, paralyzing silence that oppressed me, forced the very life and vitality out of me, much as walking his post between 2 and 4 in the morning drives the vital force out of a soldier on guard, no matter how much rest he may previously have had. I felt an intense concentration centering about the sofa on which we sat: a driving, relentless vortex of thought-waves. Then came a distinct and protracted sigh as of one awakening from a deep, refreshing sleep.

Whatever it was, it was coming to life; that same savage, predatory life which had made a madhouse of my apartment the past two nights. My head reeled from the very strain of listening to the silence which followed that long sigh.

Finally there came another sigh, followed by a loud creak; then a muffled, shuddering sound as of a breath abruptly choked; another creak which could have come from no place other than the corner where I had placed that fiend-haunted table.

It was high time to awaken my companions. By dint of shaking them by the shoulders, I did succeed in arousing them from the stupor into which they had fallen; and it was several minutes before I could make them understand what was going on.

The noises in the corner had by this time entirely ceased. Again there was a long, oppressive silence; and it was not until 1, or perhaps half past —I had lost track of time, and a single stroke of the hall clock told me nothing—when there came another sigh, then another creak, and then a persistent, muffled throbbing, like the pulsing of African war-drums from a great distance: that same ominous, brooding thump-thump that had haunted me the past two nights; that solemn, fateful, deliberate beating that speaks of war and massacre and the devices of jungle devil-doctors.

I felt Paul grip me by the arm. And under any other circumstances I would have chuckled at the thought of those two pronounced skeptics getting their first taste of that bloodthirsty presence which had made a slaughter-house of my drawing-room.

More sighs and creaks, impressed on that terrifying *crescendo* of muffled pulsing; and then a rapid, irregular pounding, as if the table were rocking to and fro in great agitation, balancing first on one leg, then another.

"What the deuce can that be?" muttered Mark, as he rose from his seat.

The noises in the corner grew louder and louder; the clattering and jarring were succeeded by terrific thumps, just as if the table, trying to rise from the floor, were falling back each time it made the attempt.

And then I realized that my own muscles were contracting in sympathy with the efforts of this unseen monster, as if to help it set itself in motion! That last heave of my shoulders and leaning forward of my body seemed through the intervening space to have given it the final lift needed to set it lurching forward, moving across the room with a succession of bumps and thuds.

A yell of amazement from the usually cool and phlegmatic Mark; he too had felt the sorcery of that wooden demon. And then: "I'll stop you and get to the bottom of this trickery!"

The table leaped furiously, bounding in a mad rush to meet Mark's charge; then a series of bumps, snorts, and Mark's heavy breathing.

Paul and I sat in a stupor, terrified by this outrageous and impossible combat whose progress we could follow all too readily by the succession of thumps and crashes that marked its course about the room.

"Help! The damned thing's killing me!" shrieked Mark. And wrenched from our stupor by his shout of terror, we leaped to his assistance.

We found ourselves fighting for our lives. The thing we grappled, and from whose frenzy we sought to rescue Mark, seemed no longer a table, but a writhing, frantic beast of prey. We could feel it pulsating under our touch, hear it gasping and snarling as a creature in the throes of a desperate struggle. It was no longer wooden, but alive, vibrant with an outlandish, murderous force

neither bestial nor human, but more terrific than either. We fought its leaps and rushes, and fought the horror with which it was inspiring us; struggled against the awful weariness which dulled us and prompted us to cease resisting our fate beneath those vicious claws which sought to grind us into the floor as they had crushed and torn Miggles.

Mark and Paul, vigorous and aggressive as they were, panted and groaned in the despair of that hideous combat, striving to gain a moment's respite from that monster which rushed and battered us against the walls, the furniture, scattering everything before it. Nor did we dare relinquish our fast-weakening grip on the demon, lest it overwhelm us ere we could escape its triumphant charge. There was no escape from that vortex of horror, the driving, relentless mentality of which increased as we weakened.

Light! Great God, if we could only have a ray of light we might overcome this victorious Juggernaut which crushed and butted the life out of us, saw clearly in the darkness which confused us and nullified our efforts, shattered whatever co-operation might have turned the tide our way: for the cunning of the beast rather than its fierce energy dominated us.

And finally, despite its efforts, I did jab my finger into the push-button on the wall near the door against whose jamb the demon almost flattened me. Light! Brilliant, dazzling light that no sun-worshiper ever welcomed as we did!

The table shuddered convulsively and thumped from its rampant position to the floor.

My friends were so white and haggard that I scarcely knew them. Mark's mouth bled; Paul was bruised and scarred; I was battered black and blue; and our clothes were in shreds.

"Thank God for light!" repeated Mark with more reverence than I had ever thought him capable of.

And we backed out of the drawing-room, not daring to turn our backs to that wooden monster.

The three of us sank into a heavy sleep from which we did not emerge until nearly noon.

PRIMED with coffee and several slugs of brandy, we ventured into the drawing-room to contemplate the havoc wrought by that fearful combat; and not even daylight would entirely restore our courage. I stared at that lustrously gleaming table, and wondered how nearly those fine, fierce claws had missed a second immersion in blood; and then I glanced at Paul and Mark. A common impulse drew us to the fireplace.

Paul kindled a fire.

"Yes. I'll chop the damned thing to bits and burn it," I exclaimed quite needlessly. "Watch that beast while I get an ax."

Mark, whose bruises and lacerations were quite painful, would not hear of first aid, and insisted that the execution take place at once.

My friends mustered up their courage and maneuvered that devilish, beautiful table into position so that I could swing freely without being cramped by chandeliers or furniture. We all felt that an extraordinary blow would be needed to cleave asunder that ghoulish lump of tropical wood: the savagery of its assault was still painfully fresh in our minds.

I squared off, getting as good a stance as I could on the polished floor; gripped the ax, poised it, made a practise swing, all the while eyeing that wooden monster, seeking a joint in its top, a vulnerable spot which would yield under my first blow: for I was possessed with the thought that the first stroke had to be mortal, else the thing would overwhelm us in its frenzy.

The table faced its executioner. Yet it was rather I who was at bay, ax in hand, awaiting the charge of a fierce beast of prey: and for once the levity of my insouciant friends was absent from their contemplation of a grotesque spectacle.

The fire in the grate crackled in merry anticipation.

"Get it done and over with, Val," whispered Mark.

The ax flickered upward . . . and then I paused at the crest of the stroke, halted by an insistent pounding at my front door. Someone was demanding admittance: and that prosaic fact dispelled the tensity of the preceding instant, and made it seem very absurd to stand, ax in hand, anticipating the leap of a hand-carved table.

"Let him in, Mark," I commanded; and I lowered the ax, for it is rather awkward to be caught in the act of assaulting a table in one's drawing-room. I felt somewhat the same relief I would have experienced had I suddenly been allowed to resign a position as the executioner of a human being. The insistent caller was the dealer who had sold me that accursed table.

"Oh, I say, you mustn't," he protested, forgetting his place so far as to lay his hand on my wrist. "Really, sir——"

"Now what in thunder is this?" I demanded. "I paid enough for this piece of iniquity, and by God I'll wreck it if I feel like it!"

"We jolly well will!" asserted Paul. "And since you sold it, what have you to say about it, my man?"

"Please, sir, put that ax aside and let me explain," begged the dealer. "It can't hurt you in daylight."

"So you knew all the while——"

The shopkeeper squirmed, coughed, and resumed: "Here's fifteen guineas, sir. And consider that I've bought the table."

"Well, how about the damage to my drawing-room?" I demanded. "You wilfully and knowingly sold——"

"Yes, sir, I'll confess I did. But I'll adjust that presently, sir. And then, noting that my fingers were again tightening on the ax-helve, "Please don't kill him, sir. I'll——"

"Kill *him?*" gasped Paul. "Really, now, but this is a bit thick. You might——"

And thrusting fifteen guineas into my hand, forcing me to relinquish the ax, the dealer set about explaining.

"A SHORT time ago," he began, "I numbered among my friends a certain eminent scientist, Professor William Percival, a Fellow of the Royal Society"—the dealer paused impressively, then continued—"who was deeply interested in all questions pertaining to spiritualism, especially table-turning. It was his theory that the tiltings, rappings, and leapings about, when not due to fraud, were occasioned, not by animal magnetism, as is popularly supposed, but by the spiritual self or ego of someone present being actually thrown or projected into the table."

As the fellow warmed up, he lost his tradesman's manner and became quite the associate of Fellows of the Royal Society.

"He believed that such a feat, usually performed unconsciously, could be performed deliberately and at will, though only by the most intense and powerful concentration. To prove his theory he began experimenting on small objects: books, walking-sticks, newspapers. And after endless attempts, conducted in the dead of the night, between 12 and 3 in the morning, when, owing to the stillness, conditions are most favorable for concentration, he finally succeeded."

"The hell you say!" I interrupted. "Do you mean——?"

"Yes indeed. Quite.

"He was sitting in his chair," resumed the shopkeeper, "concentrating on being inside a certain wooden paper-cutter, moving it about, when, quite suddenly, he felt himself pass out of his body and walk about on the table. Then came, as he later explained, a kind of tug, as if someone were pulling him by the shoulders, and he was again in his body, in the chair. The paper-cutter was several inches from the spot where he had placed it.

"The next night he tried with a book, but with no success; but on the following evening, he concentrated on a Malacca stick, taking possession of it with his ego and forcing it to stand upright and pirouette about the room."

"Do you ask us to believe that?" demanded Paul.

"Precisely, sir. I saw that with my own eyes," affirmed the dealer. "And if I may continue——

"The professor deduced that objects of wood were more susceptible to projection than others, and to these he confined his experiments. He worked next on a wooden stool, then a chair, and so on, controlling larger and larger objects as his powers increased, until finally he resolved to animate this very table which I sold you the other day.

"The legs of that table exercised an extraordinary fascination over him. I distinctly remember what he said when he came to my shop one day and saw the table for the first time.

"'My word, Ibbetson,' he exclaimed, 'what a wonderful piece! You must let me take it to my study. If I can but succeed in projecting myself into it, beware! For I shall certainly be a tiger! Ah, but those lovely paws!' he sighed affectionately.

"He seemed so infatuated," continued the shopkeeper, "that I finally consented. And then, noticing how haggard he looked, and how his eyes glistened, I suggested that he'd been overdoing it, and that his study of spiritualism was doing him no good at all.

"But he laughed, scoffed at my fears, and sent for the table, arranging for a séance the following night.

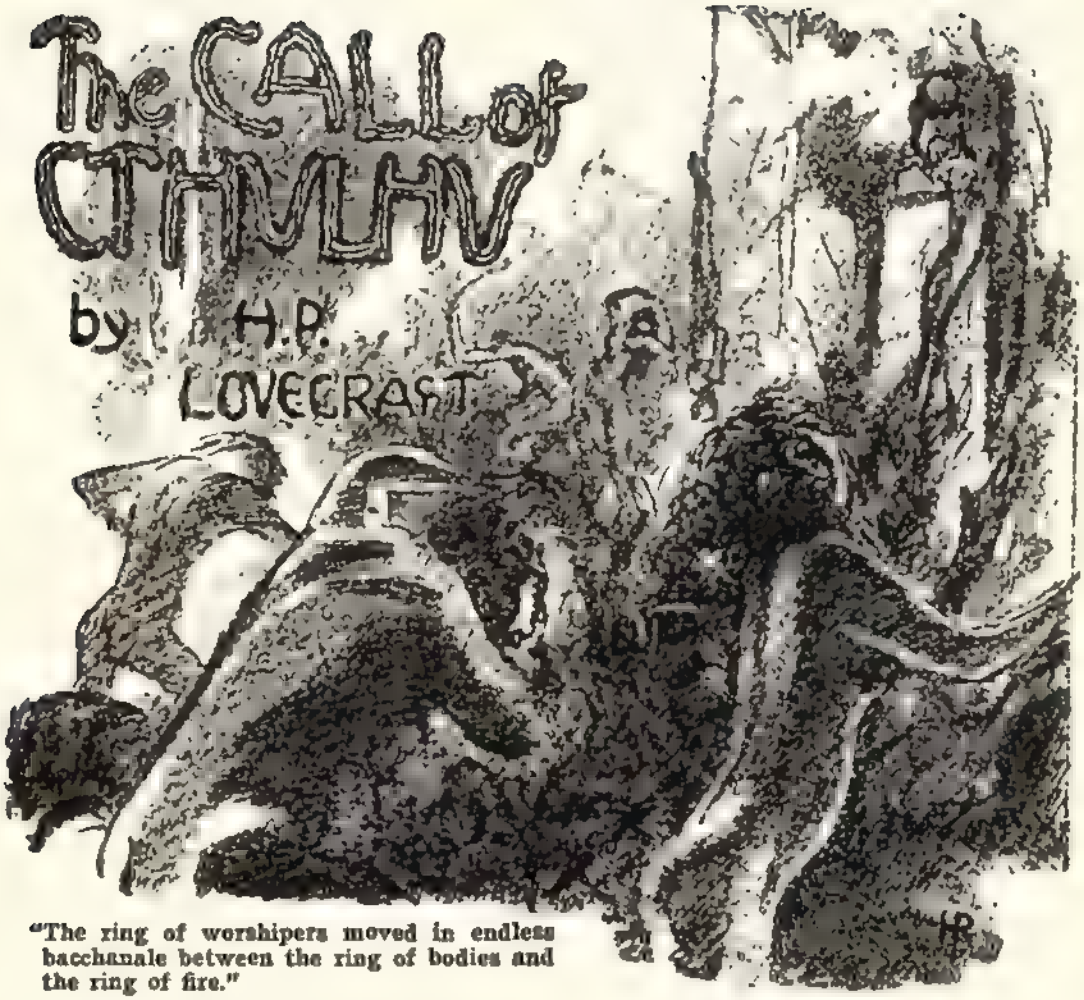
"Four of us were present: Percival, two other friends, and I. Shortly after midnight, Percival declared he would project himself. We watched him as he concentrated——"

Here the dealer shuddered, then continued: "He sat hunched forward, half crouching in his seat, almost like a beast about to spring. His eyes, fixed staringly on the table, were unseeing and glassy. Then, after an interminable pause, his lips began to quiver, and he muttered, as nearly as we could understand, 'I'm on the way . . . I'm coming as quickly as possible . . . I can't come any faster . . . Ah! . . .'

"He snarled, thumped the table furiously, yelled like some monstrous cat.

"My friends looked at me significantly; and I knew by their expressions that we agreed in our belief that Percival was mad. But before we could take any action, his eyes closed, the expression of unspeakable beastliness died out of his face, and he relapsed into a trance. I was still looking at him when my attention was abruptly called to the table. It began to throb, and on placing my ear close to it, I could distinctly hear something pulsing: it sounded exactly like the irregular beating of a heart. Then a jarring noise, and the table lunged forward, bounding and whirling furiously, leaping in one direction and another. A sudden lurch brought it violently against the professor's chair, throwing him to the floor. The motion of the table

(Continued on page 288)



"The ring of worshipers moved in endless bacchanale between the ring of bodies and the ring of fire."

"Of such great powers or beings there may be conceivably a survival . . . a survival of a hugely remote period when . . . consciousness was manifested, perhaps, in shapes and forms long since withdrawn before the tide of advancing humanity . . . forms of which poetry and legend alone have caught a flying memory and called them gods, monsters, mythical beings of all sorts and kinds. . . ."

—*Algernon Blackwood.*

1. The Horror in Clay.

THE most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.

Theosophists have guessed at the awesome grandeur of the cosmic cycle wherein our world and human race form transient incidents. They have hinted at strange survivals in terms which would freeze the blood if not masked by a bland optimism.

Found among the papers of the late Francis Wayland Thurston, of Boston.

But it is not from them that there came the single glimpse of forbidden eons which chills me when I think of it and maddens me when I dream of it. That glimpse, like all dread glimpses of truth, flashed out from an accidental piecing together of separated things—in this case an old newspaper item and the notes of a dead professor. I hope that no one else will accomplish this piecing out; certainly, if I live, I shall never knowingly supply a link in so hideous a chain. I think that the professor, too, intended to keep silent regarding the part he knew, and that he would have destroyed his notes had not sudden death seized him.

My knowledge of the thing began in the winter of 1926-27 with the death of my grand-uncle, George Gammell Angell, Professor Emeritus of Semitic languages in Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. Professor Angell was widely known as an authority on ancient inscriptions, and had frequently been resorted to by the heads of prominent museums; so that his passing at the age of ninety-two may be recalled by many. Locally, interest was intensified by the obscurity of the cause of death. The professor had been stricken whilst returning from the Newport boat; falling suddenly, as witnesses said, after having been jostled by a nautical-looking negro who had come from one of the queer dark courts on the precipitous hillside which formed a short cut from the waterfront to the deceased's home in Williams Street. Physicians were unable to find any visible disorder, but concluded after perplexed debate that some obscure lesion of the heart, induced by the brisk ascent of so steep a hill by so elderly a man, was responsible for the end. At the time I saw no reason to dissent from this dictum, but latterly I am inclined to wonder—and more than wonder.

As my granduncle's heir and executor, for he died a childless widower, I was expected to go over his papers with some thoroughness; and for that purpose moved his entire set of files and boxes to my quarters in Boston. Much of the material which I correlated will be later published by the American Archeological Society, but there was one box which I found exceedingly puzzling, and which I felt much averse from showing to other eyes. It had been locked, and I did not find the key till it occurred to me to examine the personal ring which the professor carried always in his pocket. Then, indeed, I succeeded in opening it, but when I did so seemed only to be confronted by a greater and more closely locked barrier. For what could be the meaning of the queer clay bas-relief and the disjointed jottings, ramblings, and cuttings which I found? Had my uncle, in his latter years, become credulous of the most superficial impostures? I resolved to search out the eccentric sculptor responsible for this apparent disturbance of an old man's peace of mind.

The bas-relief was a rough rectangle less than an inch thick and about five by six inches in area; obviously of modern origin. Its designs, however, were far from modern in atmosphere and suggestion; for, although the vagaries of cubism and futurism are many and wild, they do not often reproduce that cryptic regularity which lurks in prehistoric writing. And writing of some kind the bulk of these designs seemed certainly to be; though my memory, despite much familiarity with the papers and collections of my uncle, failed in any way to identify this particular species, or even hint at its remotest affiliations.

Above these apparent hieroglyphics was a figure of evidently pictorial intent, though its impressionistic execution forbade a very clear idea

of its nature. It seemed to be a sort of monster, or symbol representing a monster, of a form which only a diseased fancy could conceive. If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing. A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings; but it was the *general outline* of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful. Behind the figure was a vague suggestion of a Cyclopean architectural background.

The writing accompanying this oddity was, aside from a stack of press cuttings, in Professor Angell's most recent hand; and made no pretense to literary style. What seemed to be the main document was headed "*CTHULHU CULT*" in characters painstakingly printed to avoid the erroneous reading of a word so unheard-of. This manuscript was divided into two sections, the first of which was headed "1925—Dream and Dream Work of H. A. Wilcox, 7 Thomas St., Providence, R. I.," and the second, "Narrative of Inspector John R. Legrasse, 121 Bienville St., New Orleans, La., at 1908 A. A. S. Mtg.—Notes on Same, & Prof. Webb's Acct." The other manuscript papers were all brief notes, some of them accounts of the queer dreams of different persons, some of them citations from theosophical books and magazines (notably W. Scott-Eliott's *Atlantis and the Lost Lemuria),* and the rest comments on long-surviving secret societies and hidden cults, with references to passages in such mythological and anthropological sourcebooks as Frazer's *Golden Bough* and Miss Murray's *Witch-Cult in Western Europe.* The cuttings largely alluded to outré mental illnesses and outbreaks of group folly or mania in the spring of 1925.

The first half of the principal manuscript told a very peculiar tale. It appears that on March 1st, 1925, a thin, dark young man of neurotic and excited aspect had called upon Professor Angell bearing the singular clay bas-relief, which was then exceedingly damp and fresh. His card bore the name of Henry Anthony Wilcox, and my uncle had recognized him as the youngest son of an excellent family slightly known to him, who had latterly been studying sculpture at the Rhode Island School of Design and living alone at the Fleur-de-Lys Building near that institution. Wilcox was a precocious youth of known genius but great eccentricity, and had from childhood excited attention through the strange stories and odd dreams he was in the habit of relating. He called himself "psychically hypersensitive", but the staid folk of the ancient commercial city dismissed him as merely "queer". Never mingling much with his kind, he had dropped gradually from social visibility, and was now known only to a small group of esthetes from other towns. Even the Providence Art Club, anxious to preserve its conservatism, had found him quite hopeless.

On the occasion of the visit, ran the professor's manuscript, the sculptor abruptly asked for the benefit of his host's archeological knowledge in identifying the hieroglyphics on the bas-relief. He spoke in a dreamy, stilted manner which suggested pose and alienated sympathy; and my uncle showed some sharpness in replying, for the conspicuous freshness of the tablet implied kinship with anything but archeology. Young Wilcox's rejoinder, which impressed my uncle enough to make him recall and record it verbatim, was of a fantastically poetic cast which must have typified his whole conversation, and which I have since found highly char-

acteristic of him. He said, "It is new, indeed, for I made it last night in a dream of strange cities; and dreams are older than brooding Tyre, or the contemplative Sphinx, or garden-girdled Babylon."

It was then that he began that rambling tale which suddenly played upon a sleeping memory and won the fevered interest of my uncle. There had been a slight earthquake tremor the night before, the most considerable felt in New England for some years; and Wilcox's imagination had been keenly affected. Upon retiring, he had had an unprecedented dream of great Cyclopean cities of Titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths, all dripping with green ooze and sinister with latent horror. Hieroglyphics had covered the walls and pillars, and from some undetermined point below had come a voice that was not a voice; a chaotic sensation which only fancy could transmute into sound, but which he attempted to render by the almost unpronounceable jumble of letters, *"Cthulhu fhtagn"*.

This verbal jumble was the key to the recollection which excited and disturbed Professor Angell. He questioned the sculptor with scientific minuteness; and studied with almost frantic intensity the bas-relief on which the youth had found himself working, chilled and clad only in his nightclothes, when waking had stolen bewilderingly over him. My uncle blamed his old age, Wilcox afterward said, for his slowness in recognizing both hieroglyphics and pictorial design. Many of his questions seemed highly out of place to his visitor, especially those which tried to connect the latter with strange cults or societies; and Wilcox could not understand the repeated promises of silence which he was offered in exchange for an admission of membership in some widespread mystical or paganly religious body. When Professor Angell became convinced that the sculptor was indeed ignorant of any cult or system of cryptic lore, he besieged his visitor with demands for future reports of dreams. This bore regular fruit, for after the first interview the manuscript records daily calls of the young man, during which he related startling fragments of nocturnal imagery whose burden was always some terrible Cyclopean vista of dark and dripping stone, with a subterrene voice or intelligence shouting monotonously in enigmatical sense-impacts uninscribable save as gibberish. The two sounds most frequently repeated are those rendered by the letters *"Cthulhu"* and *"R'lyeh"*.

On March 23rd, the manuscript continued, Wilcox failed to appear; and inquiries at his quarters revealed that he had been stricken with an obscure sort of fever and taken to the home of his family in Waterman Street. He had cried out in the night, arousing several other artists in the building, and had manifested since then only alternations of unconsciousness and delirium. My uncle at once telephoned the family, and from that time forward kept close watch of the case; calling often at the Thayer Street office of Dr. Tobey, whom he learned to be in charge. The youth's febrile mind, apparently, was dwelling on strange things; and the doctor shuddered now and then as he spoke of them. They included not only a repetition of what he had formerly dreamed, but touched wildly on a gigantic thing "miles high" which walked or lumbered about. He at no time fully described this object, but occasional frantic words, as repeated by Dr. Tobey, convinced the professor that it must be identical with the nameless monstrosity he had sought to depict in his dream-sculpture. Reference to this object, the doctor added, was

invariably a prelude to the young man's subsidence into lethargy. His temperature, oddly enough, was not greatly above normal; but the whole condition was otherwise such as to suggest true fever rather than mental disorder.

On April 2nd at about 3 p. m. every trace of Wilcox's malady suddenly ceased. He sat upright in bed, astonished to find himself at home and completely ignorant of what had happened in dream or reality since the night of March 22nd. Pronounced well by his physician, he returned to his quarters in three days; but to Professor Angell he was of no further assistance. All traces of strange dreaming had vanished with his recovery, and my uncle kept no record of his night-thoughts after a week of pointless and irrelevant accounts of thoroughly usual visions.

HERE the first part of the manuscript ended, but references to certain of the scattered notes gave me much material for thought —so much, in fact, that only the ingrained skepticism then forming my philosophy can account for my continued distrust of the artist. The notes in question were those descriptive of the dreams of various persons covering the same period as that in which young Wilcox had had his strange visitations. My uncle, it seems, had quickly instituted a prodigiously far-flung body of inquiries amongst nearly all the friends whom he could question without impertinence, asking for nightly reports of their dreams, and the dates of any notable visions for some time past. The reception of his request seems to have been varied; but he must, at the very least, have received more responses than any ordinary man could have handled without a secretary. This original correspondence was not preserved, but his notes formed a thorough and really significant digest. Average people in society and business—New England's traditional "salt of the earth"—gave an almost completely negative result, though scattered cases of uneasy but formless nocturnal impressions appear here and there, always between March 23rd and April 2nd—the period of young Wilcox's delirium. Scientific men were little more affected, though four cases of vague description suggest fugitive glimpses of strange landscapes, and in one case there is mentioned a dread of something abnormal.

It was from the artists and poets that the pertinent answers came, and I know that panic would have broken loose had they been able to compare notes. As it was, lacking their original letters, I half suspected the compiler of having asked leading questions, or of having edited the correspondence in corroboration of what he had latently resolved to see. That is why I continued to feel that Wilcox, somehow cognizant of the old data which my uncle had possessed, had been imposing on the veteran scientist. These responses from esthetes told a disturbing tale. From February 28th to April 2nd a large proportion of them had dreamed very bizarre things, the intensity of the dreams being immeasurably the stronger during the period of the sculptor's delirium. Over a fourth of those who reported anything, reported scenes and half-sounds not unlike those which Wilcox had described; and some of the dreamers confessed acute fear of the gigantic nameless thing visible toward the last. One case, which the note describes with emphasis, was very sad. The subject, a widely known architect with leanings toward theosophy and occultism, went violently insane on the date of young Wilcox's seizure, and expired several months later after incessant scream-

ings to be saved from some escaped denizen of hell. Had my uncle referred to these cases by name instead of merely by number, I should have attempted some corroboration and personal investigation; but as it was, I succeeded in tracing down only a few. All of these, however, bore out the notes in full. I have often wondered if all the objects of the professor's questioning felt as puzzled as did this fraction. It is well that no explanation shall ever reach them.

The press cuttings, as I have intimated, touched on cases of panic, mania, and eccentricity during the given period. Professor Angell must have employed a cutting bureau, for the number of extracts was tremendous, and the sources scattered throughout the globe. Here was a nocturnal suicide in London, where a lone sleeper had leaped from a window after a shocking cry. Here likewise a rambling letter to the editor of a paper in South America, where a fanatic deduces a dire future from visions he has seen. A dispatch from California describes a theosophist colony as donning white robes en masse for some "glorious fulfilment" which never arrives, whilst items from India speak guardedly of serious native unrest toward the end of March. Voodoo orgies multiply in Haiti, and African outposts report ominous mutterings. American officers in the Philippines find certain tribes bothersome about this time, and New York policemen are mobbed by hysterical Levantines on the night of March 22-23. The west of Ireland, too, is full of wild rumor and legendry, and a fantastic painter named Ardois-Bonnot hangs a blasphemous *Dream Landscape* in the Paris spring salon of 1926. And so numerous are the recorded troubles in insane asylums that only a miracle can have stopped the medical fraternity from noting strange parallelisms and drawing mystified conclusions. A weird bunch of cuttings, all told; and I can at this date scarcely envisage the callous rationalism with which I set them aside. But I was then convinced that young Wilcox had known of the older matters mentioned by the professor.

2. The Tale of Inspector Legrasse.

The older matters which had made the sculptor's dream and bas-relief so significant to my uncle formed the subject of the second half of his long manuscript. Once before, it appears, Professor Angell had seen the hellish outlines of the nameless monstrosity, puzzled over the unknown hieroglyphics, and heard the ominous syllables which can be rendered only as *"Cthulhu"*; and all this in so stirring and horrible a connection that it is small wonder he pursued young Wilcox with queries and demands for data.

This earlier experience had come in 1908, seventeen years before, when the American Archeological Society held its annual meeting in St. Louis. Professor Angell, as befitted one of his authority and attainments, had had a prominent part in all the deliberations; and was one of the first to be approached by the several outsiders who took advantage of the convocation to offer questions for correct answering and problems for expert solution.

The chief of these outsiders, and in a short time the focus of interest for the entire meeting, was a commonplace-looking middle-aged man who had traveled all the way from New Orleans for certain special information unobtainable from any local source. His name was John Raymond Legrasse, and he was by profession an inspector of police. With him he bore the subject of his visit, a grotesque, repulsive, and

apparently very ancient stone statuette whose origin he was at a loss to determine.

It must not be fancied that Inspector Legrasse had the least interest in archeology. On the contrary, his wish for enlightenment was prompted by purely professional considerations. The statuette, idol, fetish, or whatever it was, had been captured some months before in the wooded swamps south of New Orleans during a raid on a supposed voodoo meeting; and so singular and hideous were the rites connected with it, that the police could not but realize that they had stumbled on a dark cult totally unknown to them, and infinitely more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles. Of its origin, apart from the erratic and unbelievable tales extorted from the captured members, absolutely nothing was to be discovered; hence the anxiety of the police for any antiquarian lore which might help them to place the frightful symbol, and through it track down the cult to its fountain-head.

Inspector Legrasse was scarcely prepared for the sensation which his offering created. One sight of the thing had been enough to throw the assembled men of science into a state of tense excitement, and they lost no time in crowding around him to gaze at the diminutive figure whose utter strangeness and air of genuinely abysmal antiquity hinted so potently at unopened and archaic vistas. No recognized school of sculpture had animated this terrible object, yet centuries and even thousands of years seemed recorded in its dim and greenish surface of unplaceable stone.

The figure, which was finally passed slowly from man to man for close and careful study, was between seven and eight inches in height, and of exquisitely artistic workmanship. It represented a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopuslike head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind. This thing, which seemed instinct with a fearsome and unnatural malignancy, was of a somewhat bloated corpulence, and squatted evilly on a rectangular block or pedestal covered with undecipherable characters. The tips of the wings touched the back edge of the block, the seat occupied the center, whilst the long, curved claws of the doubled-up, crouching hind legs gripped the front edge and extended a quarter of the way down toward the bottom of the pedestal. The cephalopod head was bent forward, so that the ends of the facial feelers brushed the backs of huge forepaws which clasped the croucher's elevated knees. The aspect of the whole was abnormally lifelike, and the more subtly fearful because its source was so totally unknown. Its vast, awesome, and incalculable age was unmistakable; yet not one link did it show with any known type of art belonging to civilization's youth—or indeed to any other time.

Totally separate and apart, its very material was a mystery; for the soapy, greenish-black stone with its golden or iridescent flecks and striations resembled nothing familiar to geology or mineralogy. The characters along the base were equally baffling; and no member present, despite a representation of half the world's expert learning in this field, could form the least notion of even their remotest linguistic kinship. They, like the subject and material, belonged to something horribly remote and distinct from mankind as we know it; something frightfully suggestive of old and unhallowed cycles of life in which our world and our conceptions have no part.

And yet, as the members severally shook their heads and confessed defeat at the inspector's problem, there was one man in that gathering who suspected a touch of bizarre familiarity in the monstrous shape and writing, and who presently told with some diffidence of the odd trifle he knew. This person was the late William Channing Webb, professor of anthropology in Princeton University, and an explorer of no slight note.

Professor Webb had been engaged, forty-eight years before, in a tour of Greenland and Iceland in search of some Runic inscriptions which he failed to unearth; and whilst high up on the West Greenland coast had encountered a singular tribe or cult of degenerate Eskimos whose religion, a curious form of devil-worship, chilled him with its deliberate bloodthirstiness and repulsiveness. It was a faith of which other Eskimos knew little, and which they mentioned only with shudders, saying that it had come down from horribly ancient eons before ever the world was made. Besides nameless rites and human sacrifices there were certain queer hereditary rituals addressed to a supreme elder devil or *tornasuk;* and of this Professor Webb had taken a careful phonetic copy from an aged *angekok* or wizard-priest, expressing the sounds in Roman letters as best he knew how. But just now of prime significance was the fetish which this cult had cherished, and around which they danced when the aurora leaped high over the ice cliffs. It was, the professor stated, a very crude bas-relief of stone, comprising a hideous picture and some cryptic writing. And as far as he could tell, it was a rough parallel in all essential features of the bestial thing now lying before the meeting.

These data, received with suspense and astonishment by the assembled members, proved doubly exciting to Inspector Legrasse; and he began at once to ply his informant with questions. Having noted and copied an oral ritual among the swamp cult-worshipers his men had arrested, he besought the professor to remember as best he might the syllables taken down amongst the diabolist Eskimos. There then followed an exhaustive comparison of details, and a moment of really awed silence when both detective and scientist agreed on the virtual identity of the phrase common to two hellish rituals so many worlds of distance apart. What, in substance, both the Eskimo wizards and the Louisiana swamp-priests had chanted to their kindred idols was something very like this —the word-divisions being guessed at from traditional breaks in the phrase as chanted aloud:

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn."

Legrasse had one point in advance of Professor Webb, for several among his mongrel prisoners had repeated to him what older celebrants had told them the words meant. This text, as given, ran something like this:

"In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming."

And now, in response to a general urgent demand, Inspector Legrasse related as fully as possible his experience with the swamp worshipers; telling a story to which I could see my uncle attached profound significance. It savored of the wildest dreams of myth-maker and theosophist, and disclosed an astonishing degree of cosmic imagination among such half-castes and pariahs as might be least expected to possess it.

On November 1st, 1907, there had come to New Orleans police a frantic

summons from the swamp and lagoon country to the south. The squatters there, mostly primitive but good-natured descendants of Lafitte's men, were in the grip of stark terror from an unknown thing which had stolen upon them in the night. It was voodoo, apparently, but voodoo of a more terrible sort than they had ever known; and some of their women and children had disappeared since the malevolent tom-tom had begun its incessant beating far within the black haunted woods where no dweller ventured. There were insane shouts and harrowing screams, soul-chilling chants and dancing devil-flames; and, the frightened messenger added, the people could stand it no more.

So a body of twenty police, filling two carriages and an automobile, had set out in the late afternoon with the shivering squatter as a guide. At the end of the passable road they alighted, and for miles splashed on in silence through the terrible cypress woods where day never came. Ugly roots and malignant hanging nooses of Spanish moss beset them, and now and then a pile of dank stones or fragments of a rotting wall intensified by its hint of morbid habitation a depression which every malformed tree and every fungous islet combined to create. At length the squatter settlement, a miserable huddle of huts, hove in sight; and hysterical dwellers ran out to cluster around the group of bobbing lanterns. The muffled beat of tom-toms was now faintly audible far, far ahead; and a curdling shriek came at infrequent intervals when the wind shifted. A reddish glare, too, seemed to filter through the pale undergrowth beyond endless avenues of forest night. Reluctant even to be left alone again, each one of the cowed squatters refused point-blank to advance another inch toward the scene of unholy worship, so Inspector Legrasse and his nineteen colleagues plunged on unguided into black arcades of horror that none of them had ever trod before.

The region now entered by the police was one of traditionally evil repute, substantially unknown and untraversed by white men. There were legends of a hidden lake unglimpsed by mortal sight, in which dwelt a huge, formless white polypous thing with luminous eyes; and squatters whispered that bat-winged devils flew up out of caverns in inner earth to worship it at midnight. They said it had been there before D'Iberville, before La Salle, before the Indians, and before even the wholesome beasts and birds of the woods. It was nightmare itself, and to see it was to die. But it made men dream, and so they knew enough to keep away. The present voodoo orgy was, indeed, on the merest fringe of this abhorred area, but that location was bad enough; hence perhaps the very place of the worship had terrified the squatters more than the shocking sounds and incidents.

Only poetry or madness could do justice to the noises heard by Legrasse's men as they plowed on through the black morass toward the red glare and the muffled tom-toms. There are vocal qualities peculiar to men, and vocal qualities peculiar to beasts; and it is terrible to hear the one when the source should yield the other. Animal fury and orgiastic license here whipped themselves to demoniac heights by howls and squawking ecstasies that tore and reverberated through those nighted woods like pestilential tempests from the gulfs of hell. Now and then the less organized ululations would cease, and from what seemed a well-drilled chorus of hoarse voices would rise in singsong chant that hideous phrase or ritual:

"Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn."

Then the men, having reached a spot where the trees were thinner, came suddenly in sight of the spectacle itself. Four of them reeled, one fainted, and two were shaken into a frantic cry which the mad cacophony of the orgy fortunately deadened. Legrasse dashed swamp water on the face of the fainting man, and all stood trembling and nearly hypnotized with horror.

In a natural glade of the swamp stood a grassy island of perhaps an acre's extent, clear of trees and tolerably dry. On this now leaped and twisted a more indescribable horde of human abnormality than any but a Sime or an Angarola could paint. Void of clothing, this hybrid spawn were braying, bellowing and writhing about a monstrous ring-shaped bonfire; in the center of which, revealed by occasional rifts in the curtain of flame, stood a great granite monolith some eight feet in height; on top of which, incongruous in its diminutiveness, rested the noxious carven statuette. From a wide circle of ten scaffolds set up at regular intervals with the flame-girt monolith as a center hung, head downward, the oddly marred bodies of the helpless squatters who had disappeared. It was inside this circle that the ring of worshipers jumped and roared, the general direction of the mass motion being from left to right in endless bacchanale between the ring of bodies and the ring of fire.

It may have been only imagination and it may have been only echoes which induced one of the men, an excitable Spaniard, to fancy he heard antiphonal responses to the ritual from some far and unillumined spot deeper within the wood of ancient legendry and horror. This man, Joseph D. Galvez, I later met and questioned; and he proved distractingly imaginative. He indeed went so far as to hint of the faint beating of great wings, and of a glimpse of shining eyes and a mountainous white bulk beyond the remotest trees—but I suppose he had been hearing too much native superstition.

Actually, the horrified pause of the men was of comparatively brief duration. Duty came first; and although there must have been nearly a hundred mongrel celebrants in the throng, the police relied on their firearms and plunged determinedly into the nauseous rout. For five minutes the resultant din and chaos were beyond description. Wild blows were struck, shots were fired, and escapes were made; but in the end Legrasse was able to count some forty-seven sullen prisoners, whom he forced to dress in haste and fall into line between two rows of policemen. Five of the worshipers lay dead, and two severely wounded ones were carried away on improvised stretchers by their fellow-prisoners. The image on the monolith, of course, was carefully removed and carried back by Legrasse.

Examined at headquarters after a trip of intense strain and weariness, the prisoners all proved to be men of a very low, mixed-blooded, and mentally aberrant type. Most were seamen, and a sprinkling of negroes and mulattoes, largely West Indians or Brava Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands, gave a coloring of voodooism to the heterogeneous cult. But before many questions were asked, it became manifest that something far deeper and older than negro fetishism was involved. Degraded and ignorant as they were, the creatures held with surprizing consistency to the central idea of their loathsome faith.

They worshiped, so they said, the Great Old Ones who lived ages before

there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky. Those Old Ones were gone now, inside the earth and under the sea; but their dead bodies had told their secrets in dreams to the first man, who formed a cult which had never died. This was that cult, and the prisoners said it had always existed and always would exist, hidden in distant wastes and dark places all over the world until the time when the great priest Cthulhu, from his dark house in the mighty city of R'lyeh under the waters, should rise and bring the earth again beneath his sway. Some day he would call, when the stars were ready, and the secret cult would always be waiting to liberate him.

Meanwhile no more must be told. There was a secret which even torture could not extract. Mankind was not absolutely alone among the conscious things of earth, for shapes came out of the dark to visit the faithful few. But these were not the Great Old Ones. No man had ever seen the Old Ones. The carven idol was great Cthulhu, but none might say whether or not the others were precisely like him. No one could read the old writing now, but things were told by word of mouth. The chanted ritual was not the secret—that was never spoken aloud, only whispered. The chant meant only this: "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming."

ONLY two of the prisoners were found sane enough to be hanged, and the rest were committed to various institutions. All denied a part in the ritual murders, and averred that the killing had been done by Black-winged Ones which had come to them from their immemorial meeting-place in the haunted wood. But of those mysterious allies no coherent account could ever be gained. What the police did extract came mainly from an immensely aged mestizo named Castro, who claimed to have sailed to strange ports and talked with undying leaders of the cult in the mountains of China.

Old Castro remembered bits of hideous legend that paled the speculations of theosophists and made man and the world seem recent and transient indeed. There had been eons when other Things ruled on the earth, and They had had great cities. Remains of Them, he said the deathless Chinamen had told him, were still to be found as Cyclopean stones on islands in the Pacific. They all died vast epochs of time before man came, but there were arts which could revive Them when the stars had come round again to the right positions in the cycle of eternity. They had, indeed, come themselves from the stars, and brought Their images with Them.

These Great Old Ones, Castro continued, were not composed altogether of flesh and blood. They had shape—for did not this star-fashioned image prove it?—but that shape was not made of matter. When the stars were right, They could plunge from world to world through the sky; but when the stars were wrong, They could not live. But although They no longer lived, They would never really die. They all lay in stone houses in Their great city of R'lyeh, preserved by the spells of mighty Cthulhu for a glorious resurrection when the stars and the earth might once more be ready for Them. But at that time some force from outside must serve to liberate Their bodies. The spells that preserved Them intact likewise prevented Them from making an initial move, and They could only lie awake in the dark and think whilst uncounted millions of years

rolled by. They knew all that was occurring in the universe, for Their mode of speech was transmitted thought. Even now They talked in Their tombs. When, after infinities of chaos, the first men came, the Great Old Ones spoke to the sensitive among them by molding their dreams; for only thus could Their language reach the fleshly minds of mammals.

Then, whispered Castro, those first men formed the cult around small idols which the Great Ones showed them; idols brought in dim eras from dark stars. That cult would never die till the stars came right again, and the secret priests would take great Cthulhu from His tomb to revive His subjects and resume His rule of earth. The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and reveling in joy. Then the liberated Old Ones would teach them new ways to shout and kill and revel and enjoy themselves, and all the earth would flame with a holocaust of ecstasy and freedom. Meanwhile the cult, by appropriate rites, must keep alive the memory of those ancient ways and shadow forth the prophecy of their return.

In the elder time chosen men had talked with the entombed Old Ones in dreams, but then something had happened. The great stone city R'lyeh, with its monoliths and sepulchers, had sunk beneath the waves; and the deep waters, full of the one primal mystery through which not even thought can pass, had cut off the spectral intercourse. But memory never died, and high priests said that the city would rise again when the stars were right. Then came out of the earth the black spirits of earth, moldy and shadowy, and full of dim rumors picked up in caverns beneath forgotten sea-bottoms. But of them old Castro dared not speak much. He cut himself off hurriedly, and no amount of persuasion or subtlety could elicit more in this direction. The *size* of the Old Ones, too, he curiously declined to mention. Of the cult, he said that he thought the center lay amid the pathless deserts of Arabia, where Irem, the City of Pillars, dreams hidden and untouched. It was not allied to the European witch-cult, and was virtually unknown beyond its members. No book had ever really hinted of it, though the deathless Chinamen said that there were double meanings in the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred which the initiated might read as they chose, especially the much-discussed couplet:

"That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange eons even death may die."

Legrasse, deeply impressed and not a little bewildered, had inquired in vain concerning the historic affiliations of the cult. Castro, apparently, had told the truth when he said that it was wholly secret. The authorities at Tulane University could shed no light upon either cult or image, and now the detective had come to the highest authorities in the country and met with no more than the Greenland tale of Professor Webb.

The feverish interest aroused at the meeting by Legrasse's tale, corroborated as it was by the statuette, is echoed in the subsequent correspondence of those who attended; although scant mention occurs in the formal publication of the society. Caution is the first care of those accustomed to face occasional charlatanry and imposture. Legrasse for some time lent the

image to Professor Webb, but at the latter's death it was returned to him and remains in his possession, where I viewed it not long ago. It is truly a terrible thing, and unmistakably akin to the dream-sculpture of young Wilcox.

That my uncle was excited by the tale of the sculptor I did not wonder, for what thoughts must arise upon hearing, after a knowledge of what Legrasse had learned of the cult, of a sensitive young man who had *dreamed* not only the the figure and exact hieroglyphics of the swamp-found image and the Greenland devil tablet, but had come *in his dreams* upon at least three of the precise words of the formula uttered alike by Eskimo diabolists and mongrel Louisianans? Professor Angell's instant start on an investigation of the utmost thoroughness was eminently natural; though privately I suspected young Wilcox of having heard of the cult in some indirect way, and of having invented a series of dreams to heighten and continue the mystery at my uncle's expense. The dream-narratives and cuttings collected by the professor were, of course, strong corroboration; but the rationalism of my mind and the extravagance of the whole subject led me to adopt what I thought the most sensible conclusions. So, after thoroughly studying the manuscript again and correlating the theosophical and anthropological notes with the cult narrative of Legrasse, I made a trip to Providence to see the sculptor and give him the rebuke I thought proper for so boldly imposing upon a learned and aged man.

Wilcox still lived alone in the Fleur-de-Lys Building in Thomas Street, a hideous Victorian imitation of Seventeenth Century Breton architecture which flaunts its stuccoed front amidst the lovely Colonial houses on the ancient hill, and under the very shadow of the finest Georgian steeple in America. I found him at work in his rooms, and at once conceded from the specimens scattered about that his genius is indeed profound and authentic. He will, I believe, be heard from sometime as one of the great decadents; for he has crystallized in clay and will one day mirror in marble those nightmares and fantasies which Arthur Machen evokes in prose, and Clark Ashton Smith makes visible in verse and in painting.

Dark, frail, and somewhat unkempt in aspect, he turned languidly at my knock and asked me my business without rising. When I told him who I was, he displayed some interest; for my uncle had excited his curiosity in probing his strange dreams, yet had never explained the reason for the study. I did not enlarge his knowledge in this regard, but sought with some subtlety to draw him out.

In a short time I became convinced of his absolute sincerity, for he spoke of the dreams in a manner none could mistake. They and their subconscious residuum had influenced his art profoundly, and he showed me a morbid statue whose contours almost made me shake with the potency of its black suggestion. He could not recall having seen the original of this thing except in his own dream bas-relief, but the outlines had formed themselves insensibly under his hands. It was, no doubt, the giant shape he had raved of in delirium. That he really knew nothing of the hidden cult, save from what my uncle's relentless catechism had let fall, he soon made clear; and again I strove to think of some way in which he could possibly have received the weird impressions.

He talked of his dreams in a strangely poetic fashion; making me see with terrible vividness the damp Cyclopean city of slimy green stone—whose *geometry*, he oddly said, was *all wrong*—and hear with frightened expectancy the ceaseless, half-mental calling from underground: *"Cthulhu fhtagn," "Cthulhu fhtagn."*

These words had formed part of that dread ritual which told of dead Cthulhu's dream-vigil in his stone vault at R'lyeh, and I felt deeply moved despite my rational beliefs. Wilcox, I was sure, had heard of the cult in some casual way, and had soon forgotten it amidst the mass of his equally weird reading and imagining. Later, by virtue of its sheer impressiveness, it had found subconscious expression in dreams, in the bas-relief, and in the terrible statue I now beheld; so that his imposture upon my uncle had been a very innocent one. The youth was of a type, at once slightly affected and slightly ill-mannered, which I could never like; but I was willing enough now to admit both his genius and his honesty. I took leave of him amicably, and wish him all the success his talent promises.

The matter of the cult still remained to fascinate me, and at times I had visions of personal fame from researches into its origin and connections. I visited New Orleans, talked with Legrasse and others of that old-time raiding-party, saw the frightful image, and even questioned such of the mongrel prisoners as still survived. Old Castro, unfortunately, had been dead for some years. What I now heard so graphically at first hand, though it was really no more than a detailed confirmation of what my uncle had written, excited me afresh; for I felt sure that I was on the track of a very real, very secret, and very ancient religion whose discovery would make me an anthropologist of note. My attitude was still one of absolute materialism, *as I wish it still were*, and I discounted with almost inexplicable perversity the coincidence of the dream notes and odd cuttings collected by Professor Angell.

One thing which I began to suspect, and which I now fear I *know*, is that my uncle's death was far from natural. He fell on a narrow hill street leading up from an ancient waterfront swarming with foreign mongrels, after a careless push from a negro sailor. I did not forget the mixed blood and marine pursuits of the cult-members in Louisiana, and would not be surprized to learn of secret methods and poison needles as ruthless and as anciently known as the cryptic rites and beliefs. Legrasse and his men, it is true, have been let alone; but in Norway a certain seaman who saw things is dead. Might not the deeper inquiries of my uncle after encountering the sculptor's data have come to sinister ears? I thing Professor Angell died because he knew too much, or because he was likely to learn too much. Whether I shall go as he did remains to be seen, for I have learned much now.

3. The Madness from the Sea.

If HEAVEN ever wishes to grant me a boon, it will be a total effacing of the results of a mere chance which fixed my eye on a certain stray piece of shelf-paper. It was nothing on which I would naturally have stumbled in the course of my daily round, for it was an old number of an Australian journal, *Sydney Bulletin* for April 18, 1925. It had escaped even the cutting bureau which had at the time of its issuance

been avidly collecting material for my uncle's research.

I had largely given over my inquiries into what Professor Angell called the "Cthulhu Cult," and was visiting a learned friend of Paterson, New Jersey; the curator of a local museum and a mineralogist of note. Examining one day the reserve specimens roughly set on the storage shelves in a rear room of the museum, my eye was caught by an odd picture in one of the old papers spread beneath the stones. It was the *Sydney Bulletin* I have mentioned, for my friend has wide affiliations in all conceivable foreign parts; and the picture was a halftone cut of a hideous stone image almost identical with that which Legrasse had found in the swamp.

Eagerly clearing the sheet of its precious contents, I scanned the item in detail; and was disappointed to find it of only moderate length. What it suggested, however, was of portentous significance to my flagging quest; and I carefully tore it out for immediate action. It read as follows:

MYSTERY DERELICT FOUND AT SEA

Vigilant Arrives With Helpless Armed New Zealand Yacht in Tow. One Survivor and Dead Man Found Aboard. Tale of Desperate Battle and Deaths at Sea. Rescued Seaman Refuses Particulars of Strange Experience. Odd Idol Found in His Possession. Inquiry to Follow.

The Morrison Co.'s freighter *Vigilant*, bound from Valparaiso, arrived this morning at its wharf in Darling Harbour, having in tow the battled and disabled but heavily armed steam yacht *Alert* of Dunedin, N. Z., which was sighted April 12th in S. Latitude 34° 21′, W. Longitude 152° 17′, with one living and one dead man aboard.

The *Vigilant* left Valparaiso March 25th, and on April 2d was driven considerably south of her course by exceptionally heavy storms and monster waves. On April 12th the derelict was sighted; and though apparently deserted, was found upon boarding to contain one survivor in a half-delirious condition and one man who had evidently been dead for more than a week.

The living man was clutching a horrible stone idol of unknown origin, about a foot in height, regarding whose nature authorities at Sydney University, the Royal Society, and the Museum in College Street all profess complete bafflement, and which the survivor says he found in the cabin of the yacht, in a small carved shrine of common pattern.

This man, after recovering his senses, told an exceedingly strange story of piracy and slaughter. He is Gustaf Johansen, a Norwegian of some intelligence, and had been second mate of the two-masted schooner *Emma* of Auckland, which sailed for Callao February 20th, with a complement of eleven men.

The *Emma*, he says, was delayed and thrown widely south of her course by the great storm of March 1st, and on March 22d, in S. Latitude 49° 51′, W. Longitude 128° 34′, encountered the *Alert*, manned by a queer and evil-looking crew of Kanakas and half-castes. Being ordered peremptorily to turn back, Capt. Collins refused; whereupon the strange crew began to fire savagely and without warning upon the schooner with a peculiarly heavy battery of brass cannon forming part of the yacht's equipment.

The *Emma's* men showed fight, says the survivor, and though the schooner began to sink from shots beneath the waterline they managed to heave alongside their enemy and board her, grappling with the savage crew on the yacht's deck, and being forced to kill them all, the number being slightly superior, because of their particularly abhorrent and desperate though rather clumsy mode of fighting.

Three of the *Emma's* men, including Capt. Collins and First Mate Green, were killed; and the remaining eight under Second Mate Johansen proceeded to navigate the captured yacht, going ahead in their original direction to see if any reason for their ordering back had existed.

The next day, it appears, they raised and landed on a small island, although none is known to exist in that part of the ocean; and six of the men somehow died ashore, though Johansen is queerly reticent about this part of his story and speaks only of their falling into a rock chasm.

Later, it seems, he and one companion boarded the yacht and tried to manage her, but were beaten about by the storm of April 2nd.

From that time till his rescue on the 12th, the man remembers little, and he does not even recall when William Briden, his companion, died. Briden's death reveals no apparent cause, and was probably due to excitement or exposure.

Cable advices from Dunedin report that the *Alert* was well known there as an island trader, and bore an evil reputation along the waterfront. It was owned by a curious group of half-castes whose frequent meetings and night trips to the woods attracted no little curiosity; and it had set sail in great haste just after the storm and earth tremors of March 1st.

Our Auckland correspondent gives the *Emma* and her crew an excellent reputation, and Johansen is described as a sober and worthy man.

The admiralty will institute an inquiry on the whole matter beginning tomorrow, at which every effort will be made to induce Johansen to speak more freely than he has done hitherto.

This was all, together with the picture of the hellish image; but what a train of ideas it started in my mind! Here were new treasuries of data on the Cthulhu Cult, and evidence that it had strange interests at sea as well as on land. What motive prompted the hybrid crew to order back the *Emma* as they sailed about with their hideous idol? What was the unknown island on which six of the *Emma's* crew had died, and about which the mate Johansen was so secretive? What had the vice-admiralty's investigation brought out, and what was known of the noxious cult in Dunedin? And most marvelous of all, what deep and more than natural linkage of dates was this which gave a malign and now undeniable significance to the various turns of events so carefully noted by my uncle?

March 1st—our February 28th according to the International Date Line—the earthquake and storm had come. From Dunedin the *Alert* and her noisome crew had darted eagerly forth as if imperiously summoned, and on the other side of the earth poets and artists had begun to dream of a strange, dank Cyclopean city whilst a young sculptor had molded in his sleep the form of the dreaded Cthulhu. March 23rd the crew of the *Emma* landed on an unknown island and left six men dead; and on that date the dreams of sensitive men assumed a heightened vividness and darkened with dread of a giant monster's malign pursuit, whilst an architect had gone mad and a sculptor had lapsed suddenly into delirium! And what of this storm of April 2nd—the date on which all dreams of the dank city ceased, and Wilcox emerged unharmed from the bondage of strange fever? What of all this—and of those hints of old Castro about the sunken, star-born Old Ones and their coming reign; their faithful cult *and their mastery of dreams?* Was I tottering on the brink of cosmic horrors beyond man's power to bear? If so, they must be horrors of the mind alone, for in some way the second of April had put a stop to whatever monstrous menace had begun its siege of mankind's soul.

That evening, after a day of hurried cabling and arranging, I bade my host adieu and took a train for San Francisco. In less than a month I was in Dunedin; where, however, I found that little was known of the strange cult-members who had lingered in the old sea taverns. Waterfront scum was far too common for special mention; though there was vague talk about one inland trip these mongrels had made, during which faint drumming and red flame were noted on the distant hills.

In Auckland I learned that Johansen had returned *with yellow hair turned white* after a perfunctory and inconclusive questioning at Sydney, and had thereafter

sold his cottage in West Street and sailed with his wife to his old home in Oslo. Of his stirring experience he would tell his friends no more than he had told the admiralty officials, and all they could do was to give me his Oslo address.

After that I went to Sydney and talked profitlessly with seamen and members of the vice-admiralty court. I saw the *Alert*, now sold and in commercial use, at Circular Quay in Sydney Cove, but gained nothing from its non-committal bulk. The crouching image with its cuttlefish head, dragon body, scaly wings, and hieroglyphed pedestal, was preserved in the Museum at Hyde Park; and I studied it long and well, finding it a thing of balefully exquisite workmanship, and with the same utter mystery, terrible antiquity, and unearthly strangeness of material which I had noted in Legrasse's smaller specimen. Geologists, the curator told me, had found it a monstrous puzzle; for they vowed that the world held no rock like it. Then I thought with a shudder of what old Castro had told Legrasse about the primal Great Ones: "They had come from the stars, and had brought Their images with Them."

Shaken with such a mental revolution as I had never before known, I now resolved to visit Mate Johansen in Oslo. Sailing for London, I re-embarked at once for the Norwegian capital; and one autumn day landed at the trim wharves in the shadow of the Egeberg.

Johansen's address, I discovered, lay in the Old Town of King Harold Haardrada, which kept alive the name of Oslo during all the centuries that the greater city masqueraded as "Christiania." I made the brief trip by taxicab, and knocked with palpitant heart at the door of a neat and ancient building with plastered front. A sad-faced woman in black answered my summons, and I was stung with disappointment when she told me in halting English that Gustaf Johansen was no more.

He had not long survived his return, said his wife, for the doings at sea in 1925 had broken him. He had told her no more than he had told the public, but had left a long manuscript—of "technical matters" as he said—written in English, evidently in order to safeguard her from the peril of casual perusal. During a walk through a narrow lane near the Gothenburg dock, a bundle of papers falling from an attic window had knocked him down. Two Lascar sailors at once helped him to his feet, but before the ambulance could reach him he was dead. Physicians found no adequate cause for the end, and laid it to heart trouble and a weakened constitution.

I now felt gnawing at my vitals that dark terror which will never leave me till I, too, am at rest; "accidentally" or otherwise. Persuading the widow that my connection with her husband's "technical matters" was sufficient to entitle me to his manuscript, I bore the document away and began to read it on the London boat.

It was a simple, rambling thing —a naive sailor's effort at a post-facto diary—and strove to recall day by day that last awful voyage. I can not attempt to transcribe it verbatim in all its cloudiness and redundance, but I will tell its gist enough to show why the sound of the water against the vessel's sides became so unendurable to me that I stopped my ears with cotton.

Johansen, thank God, did not know quite all, even though he saw the city and the Thing, but I shall never sleep calmly again when I think of the horrors that lurk ceaselessly behind life in time and in space, and of

those unhallowed blasphemies from elder stars which dream beneath the sea, known and favored by a nightmare cult ready and eager to loose them on the world whenever another earthquake shall heave their monstrous stone city again to the sun and air.

JOHANSEN'S voyage had begun just as he told it to the vice-admiralty. The *Emma*, in ballast, had cleared Auckland on February 20th, and had felt the full force of that earthquake-born tempest which must have heaved up from the sea-bottom the horrors that filled men's dreams. Once more under control, the ship was making good progress when held up by the *Alert* on March 22nd, and I could feel the mate's regret as he wrote of her bombardment and sinking. Of the swarthy cult-fiends on the *Alert* he speaks with significant horror. There was some peculiarly abominable quality about them which made their destruction seem almost a duty, and Johansen shows ingenuous wonder at the charge of ruthlessness brought against his party during the proceedings of the court of inquiry. Then, driven ahead by curiosity in their captured yacht under Johansen's command, the men sight a great stone pillar sticking out of the sea, and in S. Latitude 47° 9′, W. Longitude 126° 43′ come upon a coastline of mingled mud, ooze, and weedy Cyclopean masonry which can be nothing less than the tangible substance of earth's supreme terror—the nightmare corpse-city of R'lyeh, that was built in measureless eons behind history by the vast, loathsome shapes that seeped down from the dark stars. There lay great Cthulhu and his hordes, hidden in green slimy vaults and sending out at last, after cycles incalculable, the thoughts that spread fear to the dreams of the sensitive and called imperiously to the faithful to come on a pilgrimage of liberation and restoration. All this Johansen did not suspect, but God knows he soon saw enough!

I suppose that only a single mountain-top, the hideous monolith-crowned citadel whereon great Cthulhu was buried, actually emerged from the waters. When I think of the *extent* of all that may be brooding down there I almost wish to kill myself forthwith. Johansen and his men were awed by the cosmic majesty of this dripping Babylon of elder demons, and must have guessed without guidance that it was nothing of this or of any sane planet. Awe at the unbelievable size of the greenish stone blocks, at the dizzying height of the great carven monolith, and at the stupefying identity of the colossal statues and bas-reliefs with the queer image found in the shrine on the *Alert*, is poignantly visible in every line of the mate's frightened description.

Without knowing what futurism is like, Johansen achieved something very close to it when he spoke of the city; for instead of describing any definite structure or building, he dwells only on the broad impressions of vast angles and stone surfaces—surfaces too great to belong to anything right or proper for this earth, and impious with horrible images and hieroglyphs. I mention his talk about *angles* because it suggests something Wilcox had told me of his awful dreams. He had said that the *geometry* of the dream-place he saw was abnormal, non-Euclidean, and loathsomely redolent of spheres and dimensions apart from ours. Now an unlettered seaman felt the same thing whilst gazing at the terrible reality.

Johansen and his men landed at a sloping mud-bank on this monstrous Acropolis, and clambered slipperily up over titan oozy blocks which could have been no mortal staircase. The very sun of heaven seemed distorted when viewed through the polarizing

miasma welling out from this sea-soaked perversion, and twisted menace and suspense lurked leeringly in those crazily elusive angles of carven rock where a second glance showed concavity after the first showed convexity.

Something very like fright had come over all the explorers before anything more definite than rock and ooze and weed was seen. Each would have fled had he not feared the scorn of the others, and it was only half-heartedly that they searched—vainly, as it proved—for some portable souvenir to bear away.

It was Rodriguez the Portuguese who climbed up the foot of the monolith and shouted of what he had found. The rest followed him, and looked curiously at the immense carved door with the now familiar squid-dragon bas-relief. It was, Johansen said, like a great barn-door; and they all felt that it was a door because of the ornate lintel, threshold, and jambs around it, though they could not decide whether it lay flat like a trap-door or slantwise like an outside cellar-door. As Wilcox would have said, the geometry of the place was all wrong. One could not be sure that the sea and the ground were horizontal, hence the relative position of everything else seemed fantasmally variable.

Briden pushed at the stone in several places without result. Then Donovan felt over it delicately around the edge, pressing each point separately as he went. He climbed interminably along the grotesque stone molding—that is, one would call it climbing if the thing was not after all horizontal—and the men wondered how any door in the universe could be so vast. Then, very softly and slowly, the acre-great panel began to give inward at the top; and they saw that it was balanced.

Donovan slid or somehow propelled himself down or along the jamb and rejoined his fellows, and everyone watched the queer recession of the monstrously carven portal. In this fantasy of prismatic distortion it moved anomalously in a diagonal way, so that all the rules of matter and perspective seemed upset.

The aperture was black with a darkness almost material. That tenebrousness was indeed a *positive quality;* for it obscured such parts of the inner walls as ought to have been revealed, and actually burst forth like smoke from its eon-long imprisonment, visibly darkening the sun as it slunk away into the shrunken and gibbous sky on flapping membranous wings. The odor arising from the newly opened depths was intolerable, and at length the quick-eared Hawkins thought he heard a nasty, slopping sound down there. Everyone listened, and everyone was listening still when It lumbered slobberingly into sight and gropingly squeezed Its gelatinous green immensity through the black doorway into the tainted outside air of that poison city of madness.

Poor Johansen's handwriting almost gave out when he wrote of this. Of the six men who never reached the ship, he thinks two perished of pure fright in that accursed instant. The Thing can not be described—there is no language for such abysms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order. A mountain walked or stumbled. God! What wonder that across the earth a great architect went mad, and poor Wilcox raved with fever in that telepathic instant? The Thing of the idols, the green, sticky spawn of the stars, had awaked to claim his own. The stars were right again, and what an age-old cult had failed to do by design, a band of innocent sailors had done by accident. After vigintil-

lions of years great Cthulhu was loose again, and ravening for delight.

Three men were swept up by the flabby claws before anybody turned. God rest them, if there be any rest in the universe. They were Donovan, Guerrera and Angstrom. Parker slipped as the other three were plunging frenziedly over endless vistas of green-crusted rock to the boat, and Johansen swears he was swallowed up by an angle of masonry which shouldn't have been there; an angle which was acute, but behaved as if it were obtuse. So only Briden and Johansen reached the boat, and pulled desperately for the *Alert* as the mountainous monstrosity flopped down the slimy stones and hesitated floundering at the edge of the water.

Steam had not been suffered to go down entirely, despite the departure of all hands for the shore; and it was the work of only a few moments of feverish rushing up and down between wheels and engines to get the *Alert* under way. Slowly, amidst the distorted horrors of that indescribable scene, she began to churn the lethal waters; whilst on the masonry of that charnel shore that was not of earth the titan Thing from the stars slavered and gibbered like Polypheme cursing the fleeing ship of Odysseus. Then, bolder than the storied Cyclops, great Cthulhu slid greasily into the water and began to pursue with vast wave-raising strokes of cosmic potency. Briden looked back and went mad, laughing shrilly as he kept on laughing at intervals till death found him one night in the cabin whilst Johansen was wandering deliriously.

But Johansen had not given out yet. Knowing that the Thing could surely overtake the *Alert* until steam was fully up, he resolved on a desperate chance; and, setting the engine for full speed, ran lightning-like on deck and reversed the wheel. There was a mighty eddying and foaming in the noisome brine, and as the steam mounted higher and higher the brave Norwegian drove his vessel head on against the pursuing jelly which rose above the unclean froth like the stern of a demon galleon. The awful squid-head with writhing feelers came nearly up to the bowsprit of the sturdy yacht, but Johansen drove on relentlessly.

There was a bursting as of an exploding bladder, a slushy nastiness as of a cloven sunfish, a stench as of a thousand opened graves, and a sound that the chronicler would not put on paper. For an instant the ship was befouled by an acrid and blinding green cloud, and then there was only a venomous seething astern; where—God in heaven!—the scattered plasticity of that nameless sky-spawn was nebulously *recombining* in its hateful original form, whilst its distance widened every second as the *Alert* gained impetus from its mounting steam.

That was all. After that Johansen only brooded over the idol in the cabin and attended to a few matters of food for himself and the laughing maniac by his side. He did not try to navigate after the first bold flight, for the reaction had taken something out of his soul. Then came the storm of April 2nd, and a gathering of the clouds about his consciousness. There is a sense of spectral whirling through liquid gulfs of infinity, of dizzying rides through reeling universes on a comet's tail, and of hysterical plunges from the pit to the moon and from the moon back again to the pit, all livened by a cachinnating chorus of the distorted, hilarious elder gods and the green, bat-winged mocking imps of Tartarus.

Out of that dream came rescue—the *Vigilant*, the vice-admiralty court, the streets of Dunedin, and the long

(Continued on page 287)

The Shadow on the Moor

by Stuart Strauss

"Up he went, until he could plainly see the fearful carvings on the altar."

THE stillness of the room was broken only by the clicking of a typewriter, which went on uninterruptedly for some time. Finally a man arose, and, stretching himself, yawned and spoke to his companion.

"It's too hot to work tonight, and, besides, who could write a horror story on a night like this?"

The other man raised his eyes from his book.

"I suppose it should be thundering, lightening, and raining torrents, with a wind that whistles around the housetops. Come on, let's hit the hay, Jerry."

When he had finished his preparations for bed, Jerry Jarvais slipped out upon the balcony of the inn for a final cigaret. He stood there silent, gazing off across the moor. The night was very still, and the moon flooded everything with a soft, silvery light that brought all out in a marble whiteness—a softness that hid the grime and dirt, and gave the commonplace an air of beauty unseen by the glare of day. There was only the faintest hint of a breeze that, soft as midnight velvet, whipped his dressing-gown around his legs and made the trees bend ever so gracefully, ever so slightly, seeming to bow and quiver like dancers on a polished ballroom floor.

Jarvais was silent, rapt, alone and lost in the beauty of the night. For a long time he had heard of this section of desolate country with its mem-

ories and mementos of a lost race. No other part of England held its savage charm. Jarvais had come here seeking new material, new color, and new ideas. He had been stagnating. Before, to him, mystery had meant the East—the Orient—but here at home in the quiet of old England was more mystery—more allure than he had ever known.

Far away across the moonlit bleakness of the moor were the ruins—that mass of toppled columns and rough-hewn slabs set in crude circles. The stones glistened mistily, and threw huge, sprawling shadows beneath them like pools of blood on a silver tray.

Broken only by the whispering of the trees, the stillness gripped Jarvais; held him tense, expectant, waiting. But for what? For there was only stillness and the soft rustle of the night wind among the trees.

As Jarvais was about to toss his finished cigaret over the balcony rail and return to his room, he paused and glanced sharply across the empty lawn. He had seen something—he did not know what. There was movement, where but a moment before had been naught but moonlit emptiness. He had heard nothing, but he was conscious of another presence. He looked out again across the moor. All was as before, but here beneath the balcony was something, someone. He had caught but the fleeting glimpse of a shadow moving, where before had been but nothingness.

It was a shadow—the dim silhouette of a woman. The time was long past midnight, and the inhabitants of the inn were all asleep. What was a woman doing here, alone, on the moor at this hour? The sight of something alive, here in this deserted place, and at this hour, made him shiver. It was so out of all keeping with his thoughts and the place. Icy fingers of dread clutched his heart. Then he shrugged his shoulders and smiled. It was nothing. Some tourist out to see the moor. But what was a woman doing here alone, at this hour? None the less, here she was, moving slowly across the silvery waste toward the ruins that were so white and still in the glow of the dying moon.

Jarvais rubbed his eyes, shook his head, and looked again. The shadow was still there, but becoming fainter, and more distant. He paused, and suddenly a thought came to him. Shadows were cast by bodies; they were mere reflections of a concrete shape. Perhaps a wind-blown tree had cast it. But the shadow, which seemed a woman, was bodiless. There was only the shadow, and no figure. There were now no trees near the shadow to cast such strange reflections. To find that the shadow was actually bodiless brought back all his first terror—the sense of dread that he had first experienced. This was not earthly. It was uncanny. Impossible. Yet his eyes told him that the impossible was fact.

Through his mind raced all the tales he had heard of this lonely, lovely country, of things that should be dead, but lived; things spoken of only in whispers, and never to be mentioned. The shadow was moving toward the ruins. What was happening here beneath his window—strange, weird, terrorizing? There was but one thing to do—follow.

Silently he dropped over the rail of the low balcony, caught up with and followed behind the shadow of the woman, if woman it were.

It seemed to Jarvais that this ghostly pursuit lasted for hours. Now he would lose it and would wait. Then in a few moments he would see the dim outlines again before him, always moving toward that heap of rocks—the ruins that had held his fancy with their starkness. Now and

then clouds scudded across the face of the moon, and the moor took on strange lights and patches of color.

On and on he followed, and suddenly stopped dead-still, for in the place of the one shadow there now were many, all hurrying in the same direction toward the ruins—bodiless shapes that moved noiselessly before him.

Now that they were nearing the ruins, Jarvais could make out how crude they were, how rough-hewn; yet withal they held a subtle sense of majestic power, of latent evil; a sense of darkness and decay; a sense of age and forgotten secrets. He wondered who were the people that had built them, what strange gods they had worshiped here, and how many savage cries of exultation had risen on the still, moonlit air, and echoed far across the now deserted moor.

From out of the stillness came a weird sound—then music soft and low in the distance, soft and yet with an eery strain that chilled his blood and echoed in his brain. The music increased its beat and time, and in it were savagery and cries of lust and forbidden desires. The shadows, with Jarvais close behind, were approaching the ruins, coming closer, ever closer, and the moon now setting in the west cast pale rays on the rude stones that lay sprawling in drunken rings. The music became more terrible, tore at his brain like iron fingers. Strange voices whispered of uncanny, revolting mysteries; obscene shapes floated before his eyes. Ever, ever the music hammered at his brain. He stumbled and nearly fell. The gibbering in his ears increased, became more awful, more degrading, more passionately revolting. The music throbbed through all his senses. Frenzy swayed him, and swept away his last touch of wisdom. He was a primate—one of the first men—uncivilized, terror-stricken—back in the dawn of time—back with black terror and the rolling drums.

He gave way to the madness of the music, cast aside his garments and ran as naked as the first man after the shadows that were converging in a dark mass toward the narrow entryway between two huge, rough-hewn pillars. With a cry of exultation, Jarvais sprang after them, and then it seemed to him that the whole world was shaken by a thunderclap; a heavy weight struck across his shoulder; he moved forward, stumbled, and fell. As through a mist he saw flickering lights and heard hoots and bellows, and in his brain echoed screeches and cat-calls. The music roared into a terrifying crescendo, then blackness and oblivion came upon him.

He awoke to painful consciousness, in the gray of an early dawn, shivering and cold, surprized to find himself here alone, naked upon the gray and barren moor. How had he gotten here? Then memory came back to him. He recalled how he had run screaming, naked in the moonlight; remembered the shadow, and the horror at the ruins. He looked up and saw he was lying not more than five feet from the entrance.

Seen in the light of dawn, the piles were still sinister, but not horrible—a mass of gray, tumble-down rocks and crude broken columns—sinister, but surely no terror could lurk within them. Soon Jarvais located his cast-off clothing, and wearily started to return to the inn, which he could see in the distance, but surely not the distance he had come on the preceding night. Shakily he laughed, for he must have been running around in circles. He decided he would tell no one of his nocturnal adventures.

Unobserved he gained his room, and after bathing and dressing he joined his friend for breakfast. Nothing was said concerning his experi-

ences, and in the afternoon they returned to London.

ONCE more at home, Jarvais plunged into work with a new vigor, striving in it to erase from his mind the events of that night upon the moor—the night with all its unexplained, mysterious happenings and horrors, over which brooded those aged, ageless ruins. Slowly, as time passed, the thing began to slip from his memory, to be recalled only on moonlit nights, when he had stayed too long over his books.

As he was reading the paper one morning, he ran across an item that at once attracted his attention, and caused him to remember too vividly things he wished to forget, things that had tugged at his mind despite his desire to let them slip into the place of unwanted memories. The item was dated at the little village where he had spent that never-to-be-forgotten time:

Dead Man Found on Moor

Early this morning the body of Charles Gilbert, living at the Blue Boar Tavern, was found on the moor near the ruined temple, naked, and his head crushed by a mammoth rock, apparently fallen from the ruins. How such a huge slab had been dislodged is one of the mysteries that surround this case. Near the body were found the nightclothes of the dead man. No motive for the crime was apparent. The mere fact of the body's being there has only deepened the mystery. Gilbert was a famous student of pre-druidistic culture and remains.

To Jarvais came an overwhelming desire to revisit the moor, to see again its sinister ruins and the bodiless shadows. He wished to solve, if possible, the enigma hidden behind those rings of crouching stones. Here was something deadly, something dangerous that had taken human life and would beyond all doubt be unappeased until more had fallen under its malevolent spell.

Quickly he packed, as if fearing he might change his mind, and returned to the little inn that nestled on the border of the somber moor, where such strange events had taken place.

HE FOUND the place almost deserted. The mysterious death of Gilbert had frightened away the casual tourists. The innkeeper was pathetically glad to see Jarvais. He bustled up, and after having arranged with him about his room, he asked, "And what are you doing here, Mr. Jarvais?"

"I came up for a rest and a little quiet, Johnson."

"Well, you'll get it here, sir. No one comes here any more after Mr. Gilbert's death, sir. It's the moor. She frightens them. She's bad—is the moor. No one knows her secrets, and if they do learn—well, they don't come back, sir."

Jarvais looked at him for a moment, and then broke the silence that followed the innkeeper's last remark. "What do you know about those ruins?"

"Well, Mr. Jarvais, not much, sir. But I know this: I wouldn't go there for a million pounds, I wouldn't. There's things there, sir, that a man better not talk about. There's death there and worse."

"Pshaw! Don't be an ass, Johnson," said Jarvais crossly, and climbed the stairs to his room.

After his dinner, Jarvais strolled toward the village, which lay at no great distance from the inn. Lights glimmered yellowly through shuttered windows. At every house the door was strongly barred. As the dusk deepened into darkness the few people who were upon the streets disappeared, and except for the glow of a few poor street-lamps, the village was dead and deserted.

Jarvais returned to his lodging, ready to take up his nocturnal vigil.

He sat in the unlighted room, trying to pierce the mystery that lay out there on the silent moor. Downstairs the inn clock struck 2, the fire that had played so merrily upon his hearth was sending out its last dying rays, and the lights flickering over the walls made ghostlike figures that danced and rolled like souls in torture. Jarvais arose with a sigh, and opening his casement windows he stepped out upon the balcony.

The air was cold, with a touch of winter in its fingertips, but the moor was bright—brighter even than on that other night six months before. Shivering slightly, he stood waiting, with his eyes intent upon the patch of lawn where first he had seen the shadow which had no body.

Very slowly time passed. Twice he had heard the clock below stairs strike the hour. Finally Jarvais felt certain that nothing would occur this night, went to bed, and at once fell asleep.

Dream after dream pursued each other through his brain, each more horrible than the last. Queer bloated things danced with witches, and a monstrous hairy being without eyes performed strange rites. The eery music of the moor echoed in his brain, and in all these dreams the ruins had their grim and terrifying part, silently, broodingly overlooking the obscenity within the circle of crumbling rocks. He awoke in a cold sweat of terror, and lay for some time almost fearing to return to sleep, but finally he dropped off into untroubled rest.

After a meager breakfast he mapped out his procedure for the day. He had a letter to write, and then the rest of the day to inspect the ruins. So after posting a letter to a firm in London he shouldered his knapsack of lunch and went to spend the day upon the moor.

When he reached the ruins he stood and inspected them carefully. On that sunshiny morning the gray pile of rock looked very peaceful; vines and mosses grew here and there over them; on some of the stones were crude, carven figures, and designs half obliterated by storm and decay. As he was walking around the circle of broken rocks he soon saw the gateway through which he had plunged on that never-to-be-forgotten night. He entered and found himself in a hollowed circle which was several inches below the level of the moor. Nothing was visible except hard-packed earth. Carefully he searched for footprints, but found none. Then from the inside he examined diligently each post and stone for some sign of recent use, but again he drew a blank.

Giving up his quest for the time, he ate his lunch and then continued the search as fruitlessly as before. As far as appearances showed, there had been no one here for ages. But here a thought struck him. Before the death of Gilbert the ruins had been frequently visited by tourists, and yet there was no sign of them. Certainly this was queer. It was a puzzle he could not solve.

Tiring of his useless search, he left the ruins and started for the village and the inn. As he reached the entrance of the ruins, and stooped over to pick up his knapsack, he noticed, hidden in a crevice between the stones, a fragment of paper. He picked it up and looked at it closely. It was dirty, torn and weatherbeaten, a leaf evidently torn from a notebook, for the paper was small and could very easily have fitted into the pocket. It had been carelessly torn, for only a part of a sentence was visible. The handwriting was neat and painstaking. This scrap of writing had neither beginning nor end:

". . . discovered secret today; will return for further investigation tonight; the altar is——"

Then came the tear running clear across the page. In the still remaining upper corner were the initials C. G.

Evidently the dead man on the moor had found something that had eluded Jarvais. The mention of the altar puzzled him. Surely the matter was becoming more involved—more mystifying. Jarvais was as much lost in darkness as he had been before. The thing had a deeper look. He could see no beginning and no end. Placing the scrap of paper in his wallet, and turning the jumble of thoughts over in his mind, he returned to his lodgings.

As he opened the door, Jarvais was impressed by the bright hospitality of the place. The inn's room was cheerily alight, a huge fire blazed and flickered on the hearth, and around it, seated in a semicircle, were some of the village worthies. The smoke of their pipes wreathed about their heads.

"It is," said Jarvais to himself, "like a page straight out of Dickens."

The opening of the door caused them to turn and stare at him, and in the memorable manner of all villagers, they spoke to him courteously. Little Johnson, the innkeeper, bustled up and made a place for him around the circle, and when Jarvais had been made comfortable with a cigar and a glass of steaming toddy, the innkeeper introduced him.

"This is Mr. Jarvais, the writing gentleman who wants to know somew'at o' the moor. Mr. Jarvais, these are the mayor and the selectmen of the village."

There was a silence for some time as though all were plunged deeply into thought. Finally an old graybeard, the mayor, shook his head and spoke.

"There ain't none of us here that knows much about her, sir, nothing at all. Except George here, and George he can't speak, poor fellow, 'cause he's dumb."

Jarvais followed the pointing finger and saw, huddled in a corner, as close to the fire as possible, a wisp of a man, so emaciated and dried up that he looked like a mummy. Countless centuries seemed to have passed over his head; how old he was Jarvais could not judge. The countenance was terrifying—not a face at all, but a ghastly caricature of a human face. Always, Jarvais thought, it would haunt his dreams. Dreadful, worse than bestial, it leered at him from across the room. The mouth, a flabby gash, from which saliva trickled down the chin, moved constantly, emitting little clucking noises. The eyes fascinated Jarvais like the eyes of a snake; they were round, full, nearly opaque, of a dull gray glassiness shot with fine red lines.

"Why, he is blind, as well as dumb!" exclaimed Jarvais.

"That he is, sir. He walked too late on the moor one moonlight night and saw the shadows."

The last word scattered all of Jarvais' fast-disappearing equanimity. So the shadows were common gossip.

"The shadows!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, sir. They haunt the moor near the ruins and mean death or worse to such as see them."

"But, George isn't dead!"

"No, sir. He ran away before he heard the music, and don't you think he would be better dead? There be strange things on the moor, cries and shouts and lights where there ain't nothin', nor nobody. I tell you, sir, we stay clear o' the moor on the moonlight nights, sir, in the summer

and late fall. Rest o' the time nothin' happens. It's best not to go out o' doors on them nights. Them ruins is terrible, they be haunted places and it be wise not to go anywhere close to them, sir. I warned Mr. Gilbert, him that was killed, you know, but he wouldn't pay no attention to me and they got him."

"Who are *they?*" asked Jarvais, sensing that he was getting to the crux of the matter at last.

"They be shadows, sir; shadows that ain't got no bodies, so I hear. *I* ain't seen them yet, praise God."

Shortly after this, Jarvais, tiring of the now commonplace conversation, excused himself, and leaving the circle around the fire, went to his room. Switching on the light he noticed a package lying on his table; it was the book he had ordered from London, entitled *Pre-Druidistic Ruins in England.* Seating himself in a chair beside the shaded reading-light, he was soon deeply engrossed in his purchase. As he read on and on, he stopped with a jerk, and then re-read more carefully the following two paragraphs:

"Perhaps the most interesting of these ancient ruins are those at Humbledon, which are the earliest known, so far as we have been able to trace. How far back beyond the druids and their religion these ruins of another race and age go, we can only estimate. It is, in fact, almost impossible to tell. There is another factor that makes the piles at Humbledon of exceeding interest to students. While it is, as we have stated before, the oldest of the ruins, it is, strangely, the best preserved, and so far as investigation can go, there is no sound reason for this being the case. The carving in most cases is remarkably clear, and the dancing-ring almost in its original state.

"Here, however, we encounter the most peculiar factor in these remains. While the dancing-ring is very wonderfully preserved, the moon altar, which is the distinguishing feature of most pre-druidistic piles, is missing. The moon altar in all similar ruins discovered is a huge stone carved in the shape of a new moon. From all evidence we can gather, the victim, or the sacrifice, to term it more fitly, was tied between the horns of these altars, and then sacrificed by the sacred knife that is shown in many carvings. It, seemingly, carried a huge, crescent-shaped blade and must, from the pictures, have had an edge like a razor. In most cases the altar is found in the exact center of the dancing-ring. There has been intensive search made for the one at Humbledon, but so far without satisfaction. The absence of the altar in this, the best preserved of all pre-druidistic remains, makes one of the most fascinating studies for the student of these things."

As he finished reading, Jarvais remembered the slip of paper he had found on the moor early that morning —that torn scrap that ended so suddenly: "the altar is——." What could the rest of the sentence be? What was lost by his not having the remaining fragment? Undoubtedly Gilbert had found the answer to the puzzle and the answer to the great secret of the moor—the secret that had eluded all the other students and archeologists. Why, here in the best preserved of all these ruins, was there no moon altar? Even in the most ravaged of the others, the altar was conspicuous, but here none could be found.

At last Jarvais arose and stretched himself. He was cramped and tired. He looked at his watch. It was after 2. He had sat engrossed in his reading longer than he had realized.

PULLING on a sweater, Jarvais opened his casements and stepped upon the balcony. Again it was moonlight, for this was the season of the moon, when bright nights were common and the people of the village kept behind barred doors. The moor was white, cold, and apparently tenantless. The night was very still. Not even the breath of a breeze stirred the trees, and the shadows of the buildings and the shrubbery were solid black patches of darkness on the silver lawn. Over the moor, far in the distance, were the ruins, clear-cut

and white beneath the moon. But there was always about them, Jarvais thought, a majestic power holding threats, and a menace of dark deeds still unfulfilled.

He stood looking intently at the patch of lawn where first he had seen the shadow. He waited for what seemed to him hours; then, as his glance wandered and came back, he saw it! The shadow!

Again it was a woman who moved apparently stealthily across the lawn, but over the moor, ever toward the ruins. Stealthily Jarvais followed after her. Emulating Ulysses, he had stuffed his ears with cotton, because he had no desire to hear the throb of the music that turned his blood to flame. On and on he followed the ghostly chase. As before, he pursued the shadow, now losing it in some patch of darkness, now seeing it once more as it crossed an open place—on and on, keeping well behind the bodiless woman. Though he could not hear, he could sense that now the music was swelling out over the moor. Because of the cotton in his ears, he remained unmoved. The pace of the shadow quickened and he hastened after it.

They were now at the gateway. For some time Jarvais had been noticing the growing number of shadowy forms. The space before the entrance to the dancing-floor was crowded with wriggling, hurrying black shapes. The strangeness of being able to see all this that no other living person, except dumb George, had ever seen, thrilled Jarvais deeply. But then suddenly a thought came to him. The sight had made that other both blind and dumb, yet he himself was not affected in the least. What was the reason for this? Its mystery allured him, but he dismissed it from his mind, and sped on after the shadows. He could tell from the way the shadows were moving that the music was now booming on the air, full of hate and lust and darkness. The very thought made him think of those eery fantasmagoria of the Grand Guignol.

They were now at the very threshold of the dancing-floor. Something grasped Jarvais by the shoulders and hurled him through the gateway. Then, hearing a crash behind him that penetrated even through the cotton in his ears, so close he was to it, he turned and saw a huge slab that had fallen from the top of the archway and now lay in the exact center of the entrance. It seemed to him that the huge stone had an intention—a purpose—a malevolent design. Its fall seemed timed to the fraction of a second. Had it not been for that impetus from unseen forces—had he been but a moment slower—he would have been crushed to pulp beneath its ponderous weight. As he now glanced at it he thought it seemed to have a personality—a soul old and evil—longing to crush to atoms the lives of those who entered its once sacred portals. The mystery of Gilbert's death upon the moor had now been solved: he had been but a moment too late to cross the threshold.

Jarvais swung around again and faced the hard-packed earth of the dancing-floor. Here the shadows were gathered in a ring, circling, whirling to the soundless music, now turning this way, now spinning that, in complete silence, yet in a mad frenzy of motion.

As Jarvais watched them, it seemed as though he were becoming paralyzed, and too, something was affecting his eyes—objects became blurred and hazy, yet the shadows themselves became more and more distinct. With a rush the shadows came together, and in a mass. The dance grew wilder and more abandoned.

Suddenly they stopped with shadowy arms uplifted. In the exact center of the dancing-floor, something was rising; inch by inch it seemed to struggle through the hard-packed earth. Finally, Jarvais could partly distinguish what it was —a huge stone; and by the paleness of the moon, now dimming on the horizon's edge, he could make out its odd shape, which seemed like a monstrous half-moon lying on its back with its two sharp horns pointing skyward. Beside it was another shadow with arms uplifted: that of a man, huge and powerful. Jarvais had never seen a man of such stature. He could see the shadow's giant torso: the swelling chest, the pillar-like legs, and the arms long and muscular with great, long-fingered, prehensile hands—all this cast in high relief against the whiteness of the altar, for altar he now knew it to be. At last the moor had given up to him her deepest secret, and he knew, too, why the search of all but Gilbert had been unsuccessful—and Gilbert had paid with his life for the secret.

The shadow-man lowered his arms and the multitude of shades threw themselves on their faces as the altar finally came to rest on the surface of the floor. To Jarvais it seemed as if thick smoke rolled before his eyes. As through a cloud he saw the shadow-man rise and turn toward him and point a commanding finger. For the first time real terror smote him, and he knew such fear as few men have ever known. He tried to turn and run, but it was as if he were turned to stone as heavy and solid as those silent gray rocks about him. Amid the gathering blackness he saw the shadows, now dimmed, spring suddenly upon him. He felt hot breaths on his cheek. Shapeless, shadowy hands tore at him; strong hands they were. Surely such strength could not belong to bodiless shadows. But he could see no one—just a rolling mass of deeper blackness in the mist before his eyes.

The shadows overbore him and carried him along. Strong arms lifted him up, and now he caught a stench as of something long dead, and of rottenness beyond human ken—yet not dead, but alive, for the dead have no strength, and here was strength abundant. High, high aloft he was lifted; up, up to the altar. The mist that had been before his eyes cleared and he could still feel unseen shadowy hands that tugged at him, pulled at his feet. Up he went, until he could plainly see the fearful carvings on the altar—too horrible even to glance at again. He felt himself wrenched and stretched out and out, and then found himself strung between the horns of the mighty altar.

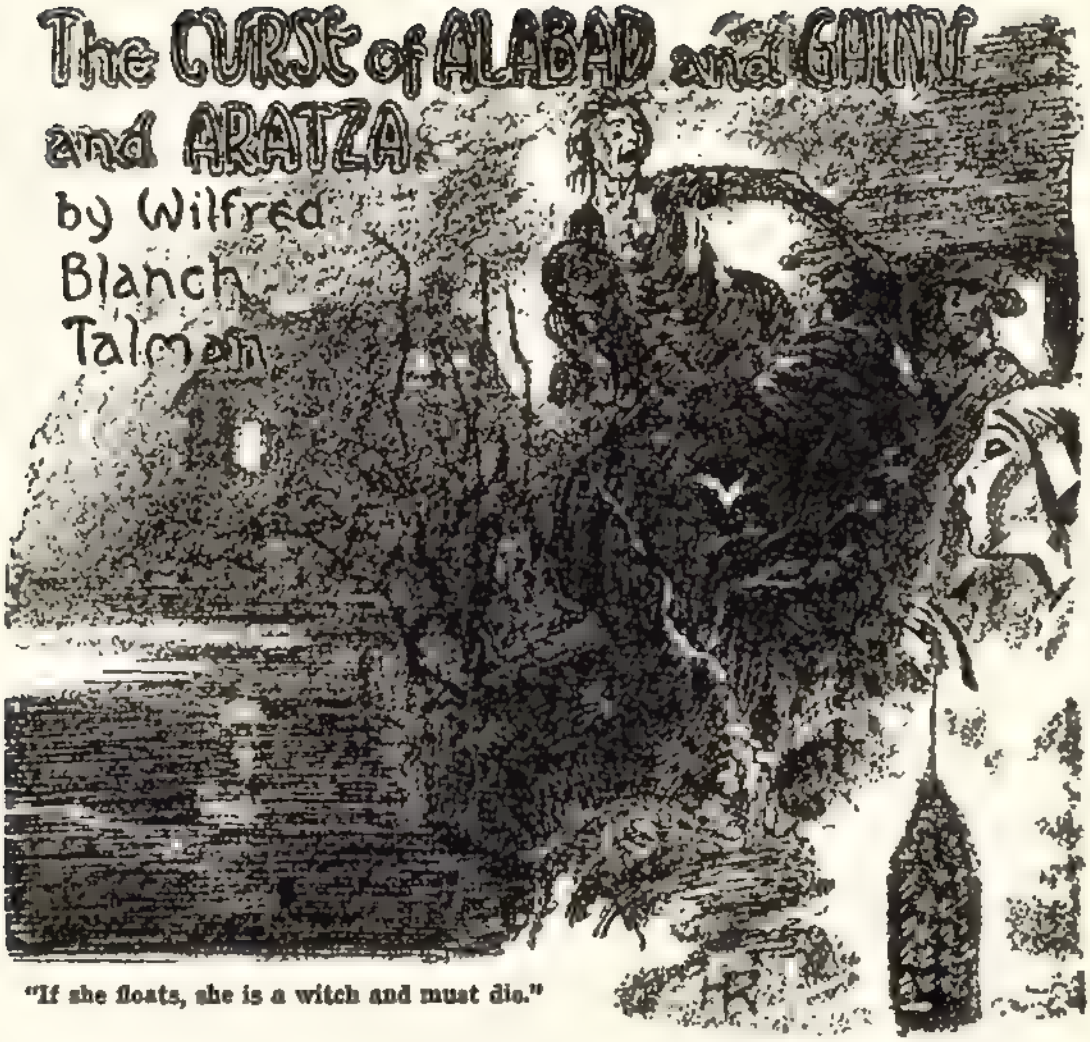
The moon had almost set, and it was throwing its last dim rays across the plain. Unseen fingers tore the cotton from his ears, and at last he heard what he had dreaded to hear: that uncanny, bestial music of the ruins. It was playing, now softly, now rising in a hellish crescendo, while all about him danced the shadows, noiselessly, ceaselessly. He turned his eyes away and looked up. Towering over him was the tremendous man, or rather the shadow of some giant from the ancient past when the world must have been young and terrible. Stretching his arms toward the dying moon the man knelt. The music ceased with a throb, and the shadows prostrated themselves in a ring about the altar.

The sudden silence beat on Jarvais' frayed nerves more horribly than the din of the music. Long it lasted, this silent prayer to the dying moon, but finally the huge shadow-man arose, reached below Jarvais, and took from its hiding-place a knife. There was nothing shadowy about the knife. It

(Continued on page 286)

The CURSE of ALABAD and GHINI and ARATZA

by Wilfred Blanch Talman



"If she floats, she is a witch and must die."

THE pot simmered as the old woman stirred it with a wooden ladle. Light from the great, open fireplace showed deep wrinkles in her skin as she knelt to sprinkle herbs into the mixture. A parrot squatting on the sand-strewn floor croaked contentedly as it preened its feathers. Smoke filled the dim room.

"*Ach, mijn kleintje,*" said the old woman, turning and speaking to the parrot, "a fine cure it will be for the child. A fine cure!"

"A fine cure!" echoed the parrot thickly, spreading its wings.

"But if the child dies, they will blame me. Already they say that I have magic. When last year I cured her child the wife of Arie Ver Veelen seemed afraid of me. She seemed afraid of me—dost hear, *mijn kleintje?*"

The parrot waddled away toward a dark corner in unconcern. The old woman went on mumbling to herself.

"And if again I cure the child, they will call me a witch. Only yesterday Johannes Kuyper would not meet me when I walked on the Claasland Road to Nayack. He went across a field so that he would not have to come near me. They are all afraid, *mijn kleintje!*"

The parrot's eyes glared unblinkingly out of the dark corner. Push-

ing a wisp of hair back under the white cap whose two starched points stood out stiffly over each ear, she turned again to stirring the mixture in the pot.

"*Ach,* and it was well I learned how to mix herbs and roots and juices from my mother's mother in Amsterdam! Many things she knew! And often have I been *dokter* to these stupid Dutchmen. But they are afraid of me, these good people. They think that I have magic because——"

A door opened, letting a hint of twilight into the little shack, and a young man entered and seated himself beside a table. His eyes glistened in the firelight, but their stare was fixed and vacant.

"Ah, Hendrick, *mijn zoon,* you are come for supper!" said the old woman, without glancing around.

"*Mijn moeder, mijn moeder,* why did we come to Nieuw Nederlandt?" He buried his face in his hands, sobbing. "All day I have tried to find work at the harvest, but they do not want me, even for nothing. They back away from me when I come near them. Even Squire Yaupy De Vries sent me off, and said that I brought evil spirits."

The old woman sighed, and continued to stir the pot over the fire. The parrot, scrambling clumsily upon the table, rubbed its bill against the young man's sleeve.

"I know. They say that I am a witch," muttered the woman, too low for him to hear. "For all that Hes Brummel does for them they say that she is a witch—because she lives with her half-wit son and her parrot; because she can cure children when they are ill. But little I know about magic. Only I know that once, in Amsterdam, when my mother's mother was angry with a neighbor, she cursed him. The next day his son was drowned in the canal where he was playing with his little boats, and they said it was because she cursed him; because she called down on him the curse of Alabad and Ghinu and Aratza——"

"The curse of Alabad and Ghinu and Aratza!" screamed the parrot, beating the table with its wings. "The curse of Alabad and Ghinu and——"

The young man raised his head, startled.

"Hold, hold, *mijn kleintje!*" exclaimed the woman, dropping the ladle and reaching quickly for the excited parrot. "No curses here! Should the child die, Hes Brummel would be to blame. No death curses now!"

The joints of her knees cracked sharply as she straightened up. Reaching high up on a shelf, the old woman brought down a bottle and carefully brushed off the dust. Into it she poured a portion of the mixture which she had been stirring, and set the pot by the side of the fireplace to cool.

"I have made a cure for the sick child of Arie Ver Veelen," she said to her son, who had dumbly watched her every move. "I shall take it there before it gets too dark."

He continued to gaze at her vacantly while she pinned a shawl about her narrow shoulders. Picking up the bottle, she held it before the light of the fire, noting the color of its contents.

"A fine cure it will be," she crooned. "A fine cure!"

"A fine cure!" echoed the parrot.

The young man's gaze followed her to the door, and returned to stare fixedly before him. The parrot hopped down from the table and went to a dark corner to preen its ruffled feathers and croak monotonously.

IT LACKED but a few minutes of complete darkness when Hes Brummel climbed the slope leading to Arie Ver Veelen's house. The building was much more pretentious than her own shack of unpainted wood. Its

walls were of square blocks of red sandstone crowned by the gambrel roof with curved, sweeping eaves characteristic of early Dutch colonial houses. From behind the double oaken door came the sound of a woman singing a lullaby:

"Trip a trop a troontjes!
De varken en de boonjes,
De kaetjes en——"

Hes Brummel knocked, and the lullaby stopped abruptly. The upper half of the door swung open.

"I have brought some medicine—for the child. Maybe it will do as good as last year. Is he any better?"

"No, no better," answered the woman in the doorway, taking the bottle and noticeably shrinking away. "All the day he has had a fever."

She shut the door without a word of thanks. Hes Brummel trudged down the hill into the darkness of the hollow where she dwelt.

When she pushed open the door of her shack, Hendrick was sitting where she had left him, still gazing blankly at the fire, which had now been reduced to red embers. On a high shelf there was a sound of scratching and cooing, and of something hard and dry trickling down upon the floor. The son's head turned and his eyes dreamily regarded the old woman, who looked upward at the shelf where the parrot had been scratching the contents of several small wooden boxes. Roots and herbs and strange dead things strewed the floor beneath the crouching bird upon the shelf.

With a scream the old woman mounted a chair and dragged the parrot down. Holding it by its legs, she slapped it first on one side of the head and then on the other. The bird squawked in pain. Green feathers dropped upon the sanded whiteness of the floor.

"Do not hurt the bird, Mother," pleaded Hendrick, turning in his chair.

The old woman ceased, one hand remaining upraised for another blow. She seemed astonished that her son should care what happened. The parrot flapped free and perched itself upon a narrow window-ledge.

"I'll teach that devil-bird to spill my roots and herbs!" she snarled, showing yellow teeth. Hendrick was not listening. He had returned to his occupation of staring blankly at the fire. The parrot glared evilly from the window.

"The curse of Alabad and Ghinu and Aratza be upon thee!" shrieked the bird, clicking his bill. "The curse of Alabad and Ghinu and Aratza! The curse of——" The voice trailed off into a series of indistinguishable sounds. Hes Brummel stood regarding the bird for a moment, then shrugged her shoulders and threw some more wood on the fire.

RUNNING footsteps were heard on the road that led past Hes Brummel's shack. They came near, passed, and the sound was lost in the distance. A half-hour later came the crunch made by cart-wheels going in the opposite direction. Low voices were swallowed by the night. Lights gleamed in Auert Polhemus' grist mill a mile down the Hackensack creek.

A dozen Dutch farmers and their wives were gathered in the mill beneath the light of crude lanterns. They looked at each other and nodded their heads as Arie Ver Veelen spoke.

"There is no doubt that this woman is a witch," he was saying in Dutch. "Only tonight she came to my wife with some medicine for our sick child, and while my wife answered the door, the child died. He was not dead before Hes Brummel knocked. Last year she gave him some medicine that made him well, but tonight she bewitched little Joris so that he died."

The nodding heads became more emphatic. Auert Polhemus slapped his dusty breeches.

"She should be thrown into the mill-pond," he declared. "It is the old water test. If she floats, she is a witch, and must die. If she drowns she is innocent, and someone else has bewitched the child."

"Ja, ja!" came from the nodding circle. Several men rose without further instructions, took some rope which hung over a beam, and started up the creek toward Hes Brummel's.

They were back before long, with Hes Brummel bound hand and foot. The old woman hissed and snarled and spat, clawing at the men's faces with her bound hands. Men and women lined up along one edge of the pond, holding lanterns over the black surface. As Hes Brummel was thrust forward toward the brink, footsteps were heard, and two men scrambled down the opposite bank.

"What's going on here?" inquired one of them, an old man who supported himself by means of a gnarled cane.

One of Hes Brummel's captors scratched his head.

"Well, Squire Yaupy," he answered respectfully, "truth is we think old Hes Brummel here is a witch. We're just going to make sure by throwing her into the pond. If she floats she's a witch, and we'll take care of her afterward, but if she sinks she's all right and we won't bother any more about it."

Squire Yaupy De Vries threw back his head and laughed. He slapped his companion on the back.

"That's one good way to decide it —eh, Jake?" he asked. "But I know a better way." He made his way carefully around the edge of the pond while the crowd waited in silence, but some of the women shook their heads ominously, as though they disapproved of any more lenient course of justice. "You, Auert," he continued, "go over to your house and get your family Bible. We shall see whether God outweighs the devil."

Several of the people caught the idea and nodded in approval. Others either shook their heads the other way or looked blank. Auert Polhemus was back in a moment lugging the Bible by an iron chain attached to it. It was an enormous book, iron-bound, with wooden covers. Hes Brummel, still struggling, was pushed ahead of the crowd back into the mill, the two pans of the great flour-scales were dusted carefully, and the Bible was laid on one of them.

"If the woman you say is a witch is outweighed by the Bible," said Squire Yaupy, "she is a witch beyond any doubt. On the other hand, if she outweighs the Bible, she shall go free. Auert, will you look to the balance?"

Auert stepped forward, and Hes Brummel's slight form was lowered slowly into the opposite pan of the scales. The balance wavered for a moment, and then the Bible shot upward. The miller was evidently puzzled.

"She's heavier," he at length decided, while a murmur of disapproval came from the farmers.

"Then how can she be a witch?" argued the squire, turning to the assembly. "She outweighs even the word of God."

Heads continued to shake, but the squire took no notice of them. At a nod from him Hes Brummel's captors loosed her bonds. Feeling herself free, the old woman darted to the door and turned to glare at her persecutors.

"The curse of Alabad and Ghinu and Aratza be upon thee!" she spat, as she retreated into the darkness.

"See that? See that, Squire?" asked one excited woman. "Only a witch can curse like that! Some of us'll hear from that curse, we will!"

The life of the scattered community went on peacefully for several days. Arie Ver Veelen's child was buried in the little plot of ground which the settlers had set off for a cemetery. Hes Brummel's half-wit son continued to roam aimlessly around, but the old woman did not show herself. Along the creek Polhemus' grist-mill clattered daily, and the sound of the great wooden hammer beating cloth in Pye's fulling-mill could be heard for some distance. Oxen and carts passed on the rutty road.

One drab morning when the sun was overcast, Roelof Pye came running breathlessly up the slope to Arie Ver Veelen's house. Grietje, Ver Veelen's wife, was busy in the kitchen with the midday meal. Roelof clattered through the house and confronted her, his breath coming fast and his face pale.

"Your little Katrina!" he gasped. "She was playing in the mill and she fell under the hammer—under the big, heavy hammer that beats the cloth. She was crushed, and she lies there now, all bloody——"

The woman fell to the floor in a heap, sobbing.

"My little Katrina! *Mijn schoon lammetje!* First was Joris, and now Katrina. *Mijn liefste kind!*" She rocked back and forth in agony.

Pye lingered for a moment, and then, seeing that he could do nothing further, walked slowly back toward his mill. On the way he met two of his men carrying the little girl's body, crushed beyond recognition, back to her home. The woman's wailing could still be heard.

The news spread quickly over the settlement. Daily tasks were abandoned and men and women gathered in little groups, looking ominously toward Hes Brummel's shack. Today, however, no smoke issued from its chimney. Hendrick had not been seen all morning. They wondered if the old witch had not departed, now that her work of revenge was done. The murmuring grew louder as the handfuls of settlers merged into one large group moving toward the unpainted wooden building in the hollow.

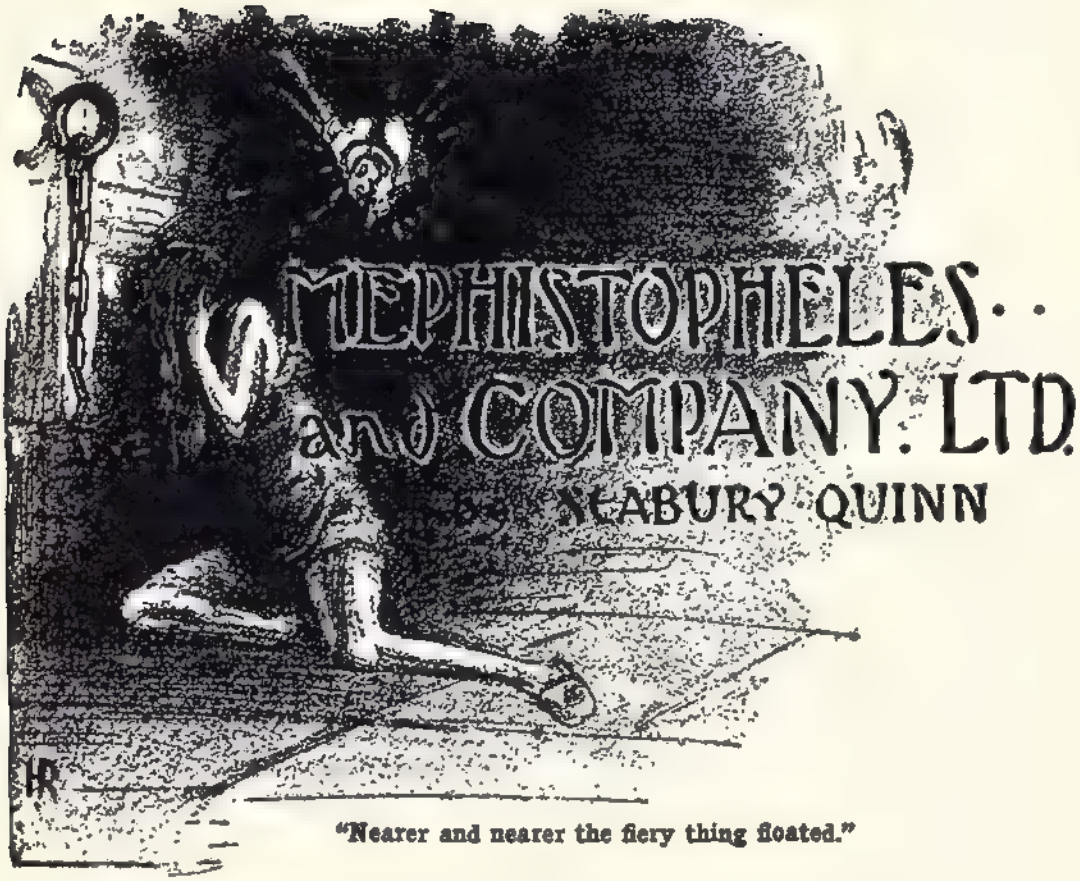
They gathered around the door, but no one had the courage to be first to enter. Nothing could be heard from within. Suddenly Arie Ver Veelen, a wild look in his eyes, dashed toward the door and shattered the latch. He stood for a moment blinking in the semi-darkness of the hut. Other men followed and looked over his shoulder.

As their eyes became accustomed to the dimly lighted interior they saw, huddled in the ashes of the fireplace, in a pool of blood, the recumbent figure of Hes Brummel with the parrot perched jauntily on her head. An open red wound from ear to ear showed where her throat had been cut. On the opposite side of the room, crouched in a corner, Hendrick laughed softly and insanely, caressing a gleaming knife.

Ver Veelen turned to run from the horrible scene, and stumbled into the men behind him. He was panting with fright.

"The curse of Alabad and Ghinu and Aratza be upon thee!" shrieked the parrot from the mangled body of its mistress. "The curse of Alabad and Ghinu——"

The bird's chattering sank to a muffled croaking as it preened its feathers. Not one of the crowd had remained within earshot.



"Nearer and nearer the fiery thing floated."

"*MESSIEURS les Americains,* dead on the field of honor, I salute you!" Jules de Grandin drew himself rigidly to attention and raised his cupped hand to his right temple in a smart military salute before the Victory Monument in our city park.

The act was so typical of the little Frenchman that I could not forbear a smile as I glanced covertly at him. Ten thousand times a day friends and neighbors—even relatives—of the gold-starred names on the honor roll of that monument passed through the park, yet of all the passers-by Jules de Grandin was the only one who habitually rendered military honors to the cenotaph each time his steps led past it.

His sharp little blue eyes caught the flicker of my smile as we turned from the memorial, and the heat-lightning flash of resentment rose in them. "Ha, do you laugh at my face, Friend Trowbridge?" he demanded sharply. "*Cordieu,* I tell you, it would be well for your country if more persons paid honor to the brave lads who watered the fields of France with their blood that Freedom might survive! So busy you are in this peaceful land that you have no time to remember the wounds and blood and broken bodies which bought that peace; no time to remember how the *sale boche*——

"*Misère de Dieu,* what have we here?" One of his white, womanish hands grasped me so sharply by the arm that I winced under the pressure. His free hand pointed dramatically down the curving, shrub-bordered path before us.

"Eh?" I demanded. "What the deuce——?" I swallowed the re-

mainder of my question as my gaze followed the line of his pointing finger.

A young woman in evening dress, tear-stains on her cheeks and stark, abject terror in her eyes, was running stumblingly toward us.

"*Lieber Gott!*" she cried in a horrified whisper, shrill and thin-edged as a scream, then struggled for breath in a paroxysm of sobs and glanced frightenedly behind her. "*Ach, lieber Himmel!*"

"*Favoris d'un rat,*" murmured de Grandin wonderingly, "a woman of the *boche?*

"*Enschuldige mich, Fräulein,*" he began, making a wry face, as though the German words were quinine on his tongue, "*bitte——*"

The result of his salutation was as forceful as it was unexpected. Throwing her hands before her eyes, as though to shut out a vision too terrible for mortal sight, the girl uttered a terrified, despairing shriek, swerved sharply away and dashed past him with a bound like that of a rabbit startled by a hound. Half a dozen fear-spurred steps farther down the path her knees seemed to melt under her, she wavered uncertainly a moment, then collapsed to the pavement with a pitiful little moan, huddled in a lovely heap of disordered dark hair and disarranged costume, shuddered tremblingly, then lay still.

"*Pardonnez-moi, Mademoiselle*"—de Grandin flung the girl's native tongue aside—"you seem in trouble. Is there anything——?" He felt her wrists for a feebly fluttering pulse, then laid a tentative hand on her left breast. "*Morbleu,* Trowbridge, my friend," he exclaimed, "she has fainted unconscious! Assist me, we must take her home for treatment. I think——"

"Exguse me, zur," a thick-toned voice cut through his words as a big young man in dinner clothes emerged from behind a clump of shrubs with the suddenness of a Jack-in-the-box popping from its case, "exguse me, zur, but I know the young lady, und I zhall be ver-ee gladt her to dake home if you will so kind be as to call me a cab. I——"

"*Ha,* do you say so?" The little Frenchman dropped the swooning girl's wrist and bounded to his feet, glaring up into the other's face with a fierce, unwinking stare. "Perhaps, then, *Monsieur,* you can tell us why *Mademoiselle* is running through the park at this hour of night, and why she becomes unconscious on our hands. *N'est-ce-pas?*"

The stranger drew himself up with an air of sudden hauteur. "I am not obliged to you exblanations make," he began. "I dell you I know the young lady, und vill——"

"*Nom d'un chat,* this is too much!" de Grandin blazed. "I make no doubt you know her entirely too well for her comfort, *Monsieur,* and that you should demand that we turn her over to you—*parbleu,* it is the insult to our intelligence; it is——"

"Look out, de Grandin!" I cried, springing forward to intercept the sudden thrust the other aimed at my friend's face with a queer-looking, shining instrument. My move was a split-second too late, but my warning shout came in time. Even as I called, the little Frenchman wrenched himself back as though preparing to turn a reversed handspring, both his feet flew upward, and his assailant collapsed to the grass with an agonized grunt as de Grandin's right heel caught him a devastating blow in the solar plexus.

"Trowbridge, *mon vieux,*" he remarked matter-of-factly as he regarded his fallen foeman, "behold the advantage of *la savate.* At handgrips I should have been as nothing against this miscreant. In the foot-boxing"—he paused, and his little round eyes shone with a momentary

flash of amusement—"there he lies. Come, let us convey *Mademoiselle* to your office. I doubt not she can tell us something of much interest."

TOGETHER we assisted the still fainting girl to the cross street and signaled a passing taxicab. As the vehicle started toward my house I demanded: "Why in the world did you knock that fellow out, de Grandin? He really might have been a friend of this young lady's, and——"

"The good God protect us from such friends," the little Frenchman cut in. "Attend me, if you please. As we turned away from the monument in the park I did first see this woman. She was running in a zigzag course, like a hare seeking to elude the pack, and I greatly wondered at her antics. All Americans are a little mad, I think, but"—he gave a short chuckle—"there is usually method behind their madness. That a young lady of fashionable appearance should run thus through the public park at a quarter to midnight seemed to be beyond the bounds of reason, but what I saw next gave me to think violently. Before she had gone a dozen steps, a man appeared from behind a patch of bushes and took off his hat to her, speaking words which seemed to cause her fright. She turned and ran toward the other side of the park, and another man arose from behind a bench, removed his hat and said something, whereat she flung up her hands and turned again, running toward us, and going faster with each step. A moment before I invited your attention to her, a third man—*morbleu*, it was the same one I later caressed with my heel!—addressed her. It was immediately afterward, as she came toward us with a great fear upon her, that I called your attention."

"H'm," I muttered, "he-flirts?"

"*Non*," he negatived. "I do not think they were making the—how do you say it? mash?—on her. No, it was something more serious, my friend. Listen: I did behold the faces of the men who accosted her, *and each face was as it had been aflame with fire!*"

"Wha—*what?*" I shot back. "Aflame with—whatever are you talking about?"

"I tell you no more than what I saw," he returned equably. "Each man's face glowed with a light like that of a long-dead carcass which shines and stinks in the swamps at night. Also, my friend, I did perceive that each man reached out and touched her with a wand like that with which the so detestable rogue would have struck me, had I not spoiled his plan with my boot."

"My dear chap, you're surely dreaming!" I scoffed. "Men with fiery faces accosting young women in the public park, and touching them with magic wands! This is the State of New Jersey in the Twentieth Century, not Bagdad in the days of the Calif Haroun!"

"U'm," he returned noncommittally. The flame of his match flared lambently as he set a cigarette alight. "Perhaps, my friend. Let us see what the young lady has to say when we have restored her to consciousness. *Pardieu*, I shall be greatly surprized if we are not astounded at her story!"

2

"A LITTLE ether, if you please, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin ordered when we had carried the swooning girl into my surgery and laid her on the examination table. "Her heart action is very slow, and the ether will stimulate——"

A deep-drawn, shuddering moan from our patient interrupted him. "*Ach, lieber Himmel!*" she exclaimed feebly, throwing out her arms with a convulsive movement as her lids

fluttered a moment before unveiling a pair of cornflower-blue eyes. "Oh, God of Heaven, I am lost—destroyed—hopelessly damned! Have mercy, Mary!" Her lovely eyes, wide and shining with terror, gazed wildly about the room a moment, came to rest on de Grandin as he bent over her, and closed in sharp nictitation. "*Ach*——" she began again hysterically, but the Frenchman broke in, speaking slowly and mouthing the German words as though they had been morsels of overheated food on his tongue.

"*Fräulein*, you are with friends. We found you in trouble in the park a short time ago, and when you fainted we brought you here. If you will tell us where you live, or where you wish to go, we shall be very glad——"

"*Ach, ja, ja,* take me"—the girl burst out wildly—"take me away; take me where *he* can not get me. Almighty God, what do I say? How can I, the hopelessly damned, escape him, either in life or death? Oh, wo me; wo me!" She knit her slender, nervous fingers together with a wringing, hopeless movement, turning her face to the wall and weeping bitterly.

De Grandin regarded her speculatively a moment, twisting first one, then the other end of his little blond mustache. "I think you would best be securing the restorative, Friend Trowbridge," he remarked; "she seems in great distress.

"Now, *Mademoiselle,*" he held the tumbler of chilled water and ether to the sobbing girl's lips and patted her shoulder reassuringly, "you will have the kindness to drink this and compose yourself. Undoubtlessly you have had many troubles, but here you are safe——"

"Safe, *safe?*" she echoed with a hysterical laugh. "*I* safe? There is no safety for me—no spot on earth or in hell where *he* can not find me, and since heaven is forever barred against me, how can I find safety anywhere?"

"*Morbleu, Mademoiselle,* I fear you distress yourself needlessly," the Frenchman exclaimed. "Who is this so mysterious 'he' who pursues you?"

"*Mephistopheles!*" So softly did she breathe the name that we could scarcely recognize the syllables.

"Eh? What is it you say?" de Grandin demanded.

"Mephistopheles—the Devil—Satan! I am possessed by him, sold and bound to him irrevocably through time and all eternity. Oh, miserable me! Alas, that ever I was born!"

She sobbed hysterically a moment, then regarded him with wide, piteous eyes. "You don't believe me," she wailed. "No one believes me, they think I'm crazy, but——"

"*Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin interrupted, speaking with the sharp, incisive enunciation of a physician addressing a patient who refuses to control her nerves, "we have not said so. Only fools refuse to believe that which they do not understand, and Jules de Grandin is no fool. I have said it. If there is anything you would have us know, speak on, for we listen." He drew a chair up to the couch where the girl lay, and leaned toward her. "Proceed, *Mademoiselle.*"

"My name is Mueller, Bertha Mueller," the girl answered, dabbing at her eyes with a wisp of lace and cambric. "I am from Vienna. A year ago I came here to accept a post as instructress to the children of Herr Andreas Hopfer, who represents the *Deutsche-Rotofabrik Verein.*"

"U'm," de Grandin commented.

"This new country was so strange to me," she continued, growing calmer with her recital; "nowhere, outside the house of my employer and a few of his friends, could I find anyone who spoke my mother tongue. I was lonesome. For comfort I used to sit in the park and watch the pi-

geons while I thought of Vienna—the old Vienna of the empire, not the poverty-stricken city of the mongrel republic. An old lady, a beautiful, white-haired lady, came to sit on a bench near mine. She seemed sad and thoughtful, too, and one day when she addressed me, my heart nearly burst with joy. She was a Frau Stoeger, and like me she came from Vienna; like me, she had lost her nearest ones in the war our envious foes forced upon us."

De Grandin twisted fiercely at the waxed ends of his little mustache and something very like a snort of contempt escaped him, but he controlled himself with a visible effort and nodded for her to proceed.

"One afternoon, when I had told her how my noble brothers died gloriously at the Piave," the girl went on, "she suggested that we go to a spiritualistic friend of hers and see if it were possible for us to converse with the beloved dead. I shrank from the suggestion at first, for Holy Church frowns on such attempts to pierce the veil heaven hangs between us and the blessed ones who sleep in the Lord, but she finally persuaded me, and we went to see the medium."

"Ah?" de Grandin nodded understandingly. "I suppose this Madame Medium told you most remarkable things?"

"*Nein, mein Herr,*" the girl negatived eagerly. "That she did not. Me she would have no intercourse with. 'Out of my sight and out of my house!' she cried the moment I entered the room where she sat. 'Begone, accursed woman, you are possessed of devils!' she told me, and moaned and screamed until I had left the building."

"*Parbleu,* this is of the strange unusualness!" de Grandin muttered. "Proceed, *Mademoiselle,* I listen."

"Frau Stoeger was almost as embarrassed as I at the strange reception," the girl replied, "but she told me not to lose hope. Too late she confided that when she first went to the medium's she, too, was bidden to depart because a minor imp had fastened on her; yet she went to a learned man who could cast out devils and had the spirit exorcised without trouble or expense, for the Herr Doktor Martulus will take no fees for his work. Now she is one of the most intimate members of the circle over which Laïla, the Medium, presides."

"Yes? And then?" the Frenchman prompted.

"That very night we drove into the country and met the professor. He listened sympathetically to my case and gave me a little box of pills which I was to take. I followed his directions to the letter, but the pills made me very sick, so I stopped them.

"Next time I met Frau Stoeger she questioned me concerning the medicine, and when she learned it had made me ill, she said it was a very evil sign, and begged me with tears to go for another consultation.

"The moment Professor Martulus saw me he seemed greatly alarmed and called a council of his associates, telling them he was certain I was possessed by one of the major fiends, since the medicine he had given me had never before failed to drive the lesser demons from their victims. But they all assured me there was no need to fear, since Belial, Mammon and even dread Milchim could be thrown from their possession by their spells. Only one demon was proof against them, and that one was Mephistopheles, the Fiend of Fiends, Satan's other self. If *he* claimed me for his own, my case was well-nigh hopeless.

"They took me to an inner chamber where the mystic rites began, and by their magic they sought the name of the fiend possessing me. All efforts were vain, and no response came to their questions until, in fear and

trembling, the professor called upon the archfiend himself.

"The dreadful name had hardly passed his lips before the whole building shook with a terrible explosion, blinding flames shot to the ceiling, and I was half smothered by the fumes of sulfur and brimstone. Something hit me on the head, and I lost consciousness. The next thing I knew I was being rushed back to town in a speeding automobile with Frau Stoeger. When I tried to snuggle up to her for comfort, she drew away from me and bade me never touch her, or even look at her again. I was marked by the Devil for his own, and even my breath or glance brought misfortune to those they touched.

"My good, kind sir"—she regarded de Grandin with a stedfast, pleading stare, like a child striving desperately to convince a skeptical adult of the truth of a preposterous story—"I did not then believe. Much talk I had heard of devils in my childhood, for my nurse was a Hungarian woman, a peasant of the old Magyar stock, and as full of stories of vampires, demons and hobgoblins as a chestnut shell is of prickles, but never had I thought the tales of devils were more than fairy-lore. Alas! I was soon to learn the Devil is as real today as when he bought Faustus' soul from him.

"The very next day as I went for my regular walk in the park a little child—a pretty little girl playing with her colored nurse by the goldfish fountain — ran to me with outstretched arms, and as I stooped to clasp her to my bosom she halted, looked at me in terror, then ran screaming to her nurse, crying out that the Devil stood behind me and reached over my shoulder for her. The negro nurse took one look at me, then made the sign of the evil eye, thus." She bent her thumb transversely across the palm of her hand, encircling it with the second and third fingers, permitting the fore- and little fingers to stand out like a pair of horns, and thrust them toward us. "And as the woman made the sign," the girl sobbed, "she bade me begone to hell, where Satan, my master, awaited me; then hurried from the square with the little girl."

De Grandin pinched his little, pointed chin between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. "More than a thousand damns!" he exclaimed softly. "There is the monkey's business here, of a surety. Proceed, *Mademoiselle.*"

"I became a marked woman," she obeyed. "People turned to stare at me in the street, and all made the sign of the horns at me. Once, as I hurried through the park after sunset, *I saw the Devil grinning at me from behind a bunch of rhododendrons!*

"Finally, I was ready to sell my soul for a moment's peace. Then, by chance, I met Frau Stoeger again in the park. She blessed herself at sight of me, but did not run away, and when I spoke to her, she listened. I begged her on my bended knees to take me to Professor Martulus once more to see if he could break Satan's hold from off my wretched soul.

"That night I went to see the professor once more, and he told me there was one chance in a thousand of my regaining my freedom, but only at the cost of the most terrible sacrifice of humiliation and suffering. When he told me what I should have to do—oh, do not ask me to repeat it!—I was so horrified that I fainted, but there was no help for it. Either I must go through the ordeal he proposed or be forever devil-ridden. At last they said I might hire a substitute, but that I must pay her two thousand dollars. Where was I, a poor governess, almost a beggar, to obtain such a sum? It might as well have been a million!

"Frau Stoeger suggested that I

borrow it from my employer. He is wealthy, and she knew I had the combination to his safe and access to a book of signed checks which he keeps in his library desk. When I refused she laughed and said, 'You'll be glad to do worse things than forge a check or steal some paltry jewelry before you're free, my dear.'

"That was a week ago. Since then my life has been an earthly hell. Everywhere I have seen reminders of my dreadful fate. Children scream at sight of me, women cross the street to avoid me, men turn and sneer as I pass by. Tonight I attended a party at my employer's house, though I felt little enough like dancing. Finally, when I knew I must be alone or go mad, I went for a walk in the park.

"*Mein Herr*—believe me; oh, please believe what I say!—as I entered the square the Devil stepped from behind a patch of bushes and raised his hat to me, saying, 'When are you coming to dwell in hell with me?' As he finished speaking he stretched out his hand and touched me, and *it burned like a white-hot iron!*

"I was terrified at the apparition, but thought my nerves had played a trick on me, so I began to run. Fifty feet farther on, the Devil rose up again, doffed his hat as before, and asked me the same question. And again he touched me with his fiery claw. I screamed and ran like a frightened cat from a pursuing hound, and just before I met you the Devil appeared to me a third time, asked me the same question, and added, 'I have put my mark on you three times tonight, so all who see you shall know you for mine.' At that I went quite mad, *mein Herr,* and ran as I had never run before. When you stepped forward with your offer of help, I thought you were the fiend accosting me for a fourth time, and I must have fainted, for I know nothing more until I found myself here."

"And how did the Devil appear, *Mademoiselle?*" asked de Grandin, edging slightly forward on his chair, his slender hands twitching with excitement.

"Very like a man, *mein Herr.* His body was like that of a man in evening dress, but his face was the face of the foul fiend and the horns which grew from his brows and the beard and mustache on his face were all aglow with the fires of hell. When he spoke, he spoke in German."

"I doubt it not!" de Grandin acquiesced, *sotto voce,* then aloud: "And you say he touched you with his claw? Where?"

"Here!" the girl returned in a stifled whisper, laying a trembling hand on one bare shoulder. "Here and here and here!" In quick succession her pointed finger touched her shoulder, her upper arm and the white half-moon of her bosom where the top of her bodice curved below her slender throat.

"*Sang d'un poisson!*—one thousand pale blue roosters!" de Grandin exclaimed between gasps of incredulity. At each place the girl indicated on her white skin there showed, red and angry, the seared, scorched soreness of a newly made burn; the crude design of a countenance of incomparable evil—a horned, bearded face, surmounted by the device of an inverted passion-cross.

Jules de Grandin regarded the brands on the girl's tender flesh with a wondering, speculative gaze, his lips pursed in a soundless whistle beneath the uprearing ends of his waxed mustache; his little, round blue eyes seemed to snap and sparkle with flashes of light.

At length: "Name of an old and very immoral cockroach, this is abominable!" he flared. "Who and where is this medium of spirits?"

"They call her Laïla the Seeress," the girl replied with a shudder. "Her atelier is in Tecumseh Street; she——"

"*Très bien,*" de Grandin broke in, "you will return to her and tell her——"

"I couldn't—*I couldn't!*" the denial was a wail of mingled terror and repulsion.

"Nevertheless, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin continued as though she had not interrupted, "you will go to her tomorrow afternoon and tell her you have decided to hire a substitute to undergo the ordeal for you.

"*Parbleu,* but you will," he insisted as she made a half-frantic gesture of dissent. "You will visit her tomorrow, and Dr. Trowbridge and I will go with you. We shall pose as new-found friends who have agreed to finance your employment of an *agent,* and you shall suffer no harm, for we shall be with you. Meantime"—he consulted the tiny gold watch strapped to his wrist—"it grows late. Come; Dr. Trowbridge and I will take you to Monsieur Hopfer's house and see you safely within doors."

"But," she protested, snatching at his jacket sleeve as a drowning person might clutch a rope, "but, *mein Herr,* what of the Devil? I am afraid. Suppose he——"

A tiny network of wrinkles deepened suddenly about the outer corners of de Grandin's small, round eyes. From the side pocket of his dinner coat he produced a long-barreled French army revolver and patted its walnut stock affectionately. "*Mademoiselle,*" he assured her, "should *Monsieur le Diable* manifest himself to us, I think we have here the fire necessary to fight him. Come—*allons*—let us go."

"JUST what is your idea of mixing up in this nonsense?" I demanded somewhat coolly as we drove home from returning Fräulein Mueller to her employer's house. "This looks like a plain case of hysteria to me, and what you expect to accomplish is more than I——"

"Indeed?" he answered sarcastically. "The brands on Mademoiselle Mueller's flesh, they, too, were perhaps marks of hysteria?"

"Well," I temporized, "I can't exactly account for them, but——"

"But you are like all other good, kind souls who see no farther than the points of their noses and declare all outside that distance to be nonexistent," he interrupted with a grin. "*Non, non,* Trowbridge, my friend, I fear you are unable to recognize the beans, even when the sack has been opened for you. Consider, *mon ami,* think, cogitate and reflect on what we have witnessed this night. Recall the details of the young lady's story, if you please.

"Does not her experience point to a great, a marvelously organized criminal band as plainly as a road map indicates the motorist's route? I think yes. Alone and friendless in a strange city, she meets a woman who claims to come from her own country—after she has been told first what that country is. Is that only happen-so? I think no. The girl must have let slip the information that she has access to her master's safe and checkbook, and so she was deemed fitting prey for this criminal gang. Does not every step of her path of misfortune mark the trail these wicked ones followed to bring her to a state of desperation where she would be ready to commit larceny?

"What of the supposed demon who accosted her in the park tonight? She thought he was one, but I saw three men rise up from behind shrubbery and address her. I, too, saw their faces shine with fire, but it was not the fire of flame, as she believed. *Mais non,* did I not say it was like the light given off by rotting car-

casses? What then? The answer is simple. Me, I believe these three men who seemed but one to her, wore false beards and eyebrows—masks, perhaps—which were smeared with some sort of luminous paint, the better to simulate the popular conception of the Devil and terrify a girl already half insane with terror.

"Very well, let us proceed another step. The big young man who came upon us so suddenly, the man who claimed to know her and would have borne her off had I not argued with him with the heel of the boot—did he, too, not speak with the accent of the German tongue, even as she does? Surely. Beyond doubt, my friend, he was one of the three men with fiery faces who had addressed her a moment before, and who sought to take her from us when he thought we would rescue her.

"Another thing: I have noted the manners and customs of many men in many places, and I know the charms they employ against evil. 'What of that?' you ask. 'This,' I reply: 'Never does the American or Englishman make the sign of the horns to ward off the evil eye. That is distinctly a continental European custom.' Therefore, when I hear the negro nurse made the horns at Mademoiselle Mueller in the park I smell a fish in her story. Wherever that black woman — undoubtlessly herself an American—learned that sign, she did not learn it from an American. An American seeing her make that sign would have understood nothing from it; but Mademoiselle Mueller is no American. She is fresh from Europe, where that sign means something, and she understood what the negress meant when she made the horns at her—as it was intended she should."

"Well," I replied, "what's your theory, then?"

"Simply this: The child who fled from Mademoiselle Mueller, the negro nurse who made the evil sign at her, the people who passed her in the street and turned away—all had been planted in her path for the purpose of wearing down her resistance, of obtaining her goat, as you Americans say. But listen: They demanded of her only two thousand dollars. Why? Because they thought she could get no more. Yet so elaborate a system as theirs surely would not have been organized for the tiny sum they demanded. No, men do not take elephant guns into the fields to hunt butterflies. This poor girl is but one of many victims these rogues have preyed upon. The Stoeger woman is one of their scouts who happened to fall upon her, but they must have imposed on many other foolish women —men, too, undoubtlessly, and therefore——" He paused, his lips parted in an expectant grin, his little eyes gleaming with excitement and elation.

"All right; I'll bite," I replied. "Therefore——"

"Attend me, my friend," he replied irrelevantly; "have you ever been in India?"

"No!"

"Very good. I will tell you things. In that land the natives are much plagued by tigers, is it not so?"

"So I've heard."

"*Parfaitement.* When the white man comes to rid a community of the striped devil of the jungle, what does he do?"

"Do?"

"But of course! He climbs into a convenient tree and waits, does he not, and beneath the tree, for bait, he tethers a luckless goat, is it not so?"

"Why——"

"Very good, my friend. You and I are the hunters. This gang of miscreants are the tigers. The unfortunate Mademoiselle Mueller is——"

"Good heavens, man!" I exclaimed, the full purport of his scheme dawning on me. "You don't mean——"

"But certainly," he nodded with perfect aplomb, "she is the goat who lures the tigers within range of our guns."

His small, even teeth came together with a sharp, decided click. "Come, my friend," he bade as we drew up before my house, "let us to bed. We shall have need of a good night's sleep, for tomorrow—*parbleu,* I damn think we shall have much good sport before we take the pelts from off these two-legged tigers!"

3

A NEGRO dwarf, whose excessively ugly features were rendered still less prepossessing by deep smallpox pits, opened the stained-glass-and-walnut door of the big house in Tecumseh Street where we called with Fräulein Mueller about 4 o'clock the following afternoon.

"Have you an appointment with the Sibyl?" he asked arrogantly as he ushered us into the rug-strewn hall and paused before a heavily curtained doorway.

"*La, la,*" de Grandin murmured wonderingly, "is she then a dentist or physician that one must arrange beforehand to consult her? We have no appointment, my friend; nevertheless, you will inform her that we desire to see her, and without unnecessary delay."

The undersized servitor blinked in amazement. Callers on Madame Laïla were wont to arrive in humble mien, apparently, and the little Frenchman's high-handed manner was a distinct novelty.

"Perhaps the Seeress will consent to see you, even though it's usual to arrange for a sitting beforehand," he replied in a slightly more cordial tone, presenting de Grandin with a pencil and pad of paper. "Kindly write your name on this tablet," he requested, then, as the Frenchman complied: "Tear the sheet off and put it in your pocket. It is not necessary for the Sibyl to see it in order to know your name; we only ask that you write it as a guaranty of good faith. Await me here; I will see if you can be admitted."

We had not long to wait, for the attendant returned almost before the curtains through which he had vanished had ceased to sway, and bowed formally to us. "The Sibyl will see you, Dr. de Grandin," he announced, holding the draperies aside.

I gave a slight start as my companion was addressed by name, for I had seen him stow the folded sheet of paper on which he had scribbled his signature in his waistcoat pocket.

"Laïla the Seeress sees all and knows all," the black dwarf informed me, as though reading my mind. "There are no secrets from her. This way, if you please."

The room we entered was hung with unrelieved black and lighted only by a lamp with three burners suspended from the ceiling by a bronze chain. Slightly beyond the center of the apartment sat a young woman garbed in a long, loose robe of some clinging black stuff with a head-dress resembling a nun's wimple of the same sable hue. Her face denoted she was about twenty-five or twenty-six years old, though, contrary to the usual feminine custom, she appeared anxious to seem older. Her long, excessively thin arms were bare, as were her neck and feet, and the contrast of her pale flesh and black draperies in the room was an eery one. About her waist was a wide belt of shining black leather clasped with a garnet fastening which flashed fitfully in the chamber's half-light. In one hand she held a three-foot wand tipped with an ivory hand with outspread fingers, and she was seated on a sort of three-legged stool roughly resembling an ancient Greek tripod. From a brazen censer standing on the floor before her emanated penetrating, acrid

odors, while the charcoal fire in the incense pot glowed and sank to dullness alternately as though blown upon by a bellows, though no instrument from which a draft could come was visible.

"What seek ye here, oh man?" she demanded in a hollow, sepulchral voice, fixing her deep-set eyes on de Grandin.

The little Frenchman bowed with continental courtesy. "*Madame,*" he explained, "we have learned this unfortunate young lady's plight and have determined to aid her. The sum of two thousand dollars is required in order to save her the pain and humiliation of a most terrifying ordeal, and this sum we are prepared to advance, provided, of course, you can offer proper guaranty——"

"Thy money perish with thee!" rejoined the Seeress furiously, half rising from her tripod; then, as though relenting: "Stay, power over the spirits have I none, but I can direct thee to one whose power is infinite.

"Woman," her glowing, cavernous orbs bored into the frightened blue eyes of the little Austrian girl, "if thou wouldst be freed from the demon who dominates thee, be at this house at precisely 7 o'clock this evening. Come alone and bring the money with thee, and — perhaps — Martulus the Mighty will consent to have thee exorcised by proxy. I can promise thee naught, but what I can do, I will. Wilt thou come?"

"*Ach, ja, ja!*" Fräulein Mueller sobbed hysterically, clutching at the Sibyl's black raiment. But the Seeress had risen from her stool and stalked majestically from the room, leaving us bewildered and alone.

"*Mort d'une sèche,*" de Grandin chuckled as we re-entered my study and regarded each other across the table, "but the entertainment they furnish at Madame Laïla's is worthy of the Odéon! Behold how they assault the superstitions of the caller at the very front door with their trick of name-reading. *Parbleu,* but it is droll!"

"It seemed mysterious enough to me," I admitted. "Do you know how it was done?"

"*Tiens,* my friend, am I a little, wondering boy to be mystified by the trickery of a fire-eater?" he returned with a grin. "But certainly, it was the simplest of tricks. The top sheet of the tablet whereon I wrote my name was almost as thin as tissue paper and the pencil was so hard I had to bear down heavily in order to leave any mark at all. The second sheet of paper was coated with a thin layer of wax, and when the colored man took the tablet inside with him they simply dusted lampblack over it, then blew it off and read what I had written where the blacking remained in the pencil's impression in the wax. It is very simple."

"Well!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "What made the charcoal brazier glow and subside——"

"Enough!" he interrupted. "We have more to do than explain the cheap wonders of a cheap fortune-teller's establishment this afternoon, my friend. Do you go for a walk, a nap or a game of solitaire. Me, I have much to do between now and 7 o'clock. Be sure to have your car ready and waiting at the corner of Tecumseh and Irvine Streets at fifty minutes after 6, if you please. I go to perform important duties." And, lighting a cigarette, he picked up his hat and cane and set off for the corner pharmacy humming a snatch of sentimental tune:

> "Le souvenir, présent céleste,
> Ombre des biens que l'on n'a plus,
> Est encore un plaisir qui reste,
> Après tous ceux qu'on a perdus."

4

FROM the shelter of a convenient areaway de Grandin and I watched the door of Laïla's house as

the city hall clock boomed out the hour of 7.

Falteringly, plainly in a state bordering on collapse, but more afraid of turning back than of unknown dangers before her, Fräulein Mueller mounted the mansion's wide stone steps and rang the doorbell timidly.

As soon as the black dwarf had admitted her, de Grandin leaped up the area steps and hastened across the street to the big, black limousine parked before Laïla's door. For a moment he fumbled about the car's gas tank, then sped back to where I waited and riveted his gaze on the portal through which Fräulein Mueller had vanished.

We had not long to wait. Almost before the Frenchman had regained his ambush, the big door swung open and Laïla and the little Austrian girl emerged, descended the curving stairs and entered the waiting limousine. There was a buzzing, irritable hum of the self-starter, the spiteful swish of the powerful motor going into action; then, with a low, steady hum, the car glided from the curb and shot down the street with surprizing speed.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin urged, seizing me by the hand and dragging me to the street, "to your car. Haste! We must follow them!"

I gazed after the fleeing motor and shook my head. "Not a chance," I declared. "They're doing better than thirty miles an hour now, and gathering speed all the time. We'd never be able to keep their trail with my little rattletrap."

"My friend," he replied, piloting me across the street and fairly shoving me into my car, "Jules de Grandin is no fool. Think you he slept away his time this afternoon? *Regardez-vous!*" With a dramatic gesture he pointed to the roadway before us.

I blinked my eyes in astonishment, then grinned in appreciation of his strategy. In the wake of the speeding limousine there shone a faint but unmistakable trail of luminous dots against the cement pavement. Now I understood what he had been doing at the other car's tail during the interval between Fräulein Mueller's entrance and Laïla's exit. Firmly attached to the limousine's gas tank was a small can of luminous paint, a small hole pierced in its bottom permitting its telltale contents to leak out, a drop at a time, at intervals which spattered the roadway with glowing trail-markers every thirty or forty feet.

Through the city, over country roads, up hill and down, over viaducts, across stretches of low-lying marshes, through wide, wooded areas and between long, undulating stretches of fields ripe for harvesting, the chase continued. The mileage dial on my dashboard registered forty-five, sixty, sixty-five miles before the car ahead swerved sharply from the highway, shot down a private lane, and entered the high, iron-grilled gateway of a walled estate.

"*Eh bien,*" remarked de Grandin, "here we are, of a surety, but where is it we are?" Parking our car behind a convenient copse of second-growth pines, we stole forward to reconnoiter the enemy's position. Our progress was barred by the tall iron gates which had been securely locked behind our quarry. Through the grillework of the barrier we could descry tall evergreens bowing and whispering with cemeterylike somberness on each side of a wide, curving driveway, and between their ranks we caught momentary glimpses of the ivy-covered walls and white porch pillars of a large Colonial-type residence.

De Grandin gave the gate-handle a tentative shake, confirming our suspicion that it was firmly secured. "It would be wiser not to attempt scaling

these bars, Friend Trowbridge," he decided after an inspection of the iron uprights composing the grille; "the visibility would be too high, and I have no wish to stop, or even to impede, a bullet. Let us see what opportunities the walls afford." We drew back from the entrance and walked softly along the strip of grass bordering the wall's base, seeking a favorable location for swarming up.

"Why not here?" the Frenchman suggested, halting at a spot where the ivy grew thicker than elsewhere. "I will go first, do you keep a sharp look-out to the rear." Pulling his jacket sleeves upward with a quick, nervous jerk, he laid hold of the clinging vines, braced his feet against the bricks and prepared to swing himself upward, then paused abruptly, casting a hasty glance over his shoulder.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge, to cover!" he urged, suiting action to his warning and dragging me to the shelter of a near-by bush. "We are observed!"

Hand on pistol, he crouched alertly while the light, barely audible step of someone advancing through the thicket sounded nearer and nearer on the carpet of early fall leaves lying on the ground about the tree-roots.

"Dieu de Dieu!" he exclaimed with a noiseless chuckle as the stranger emerged from the thicket. "A pussy!" A big, black-and-white tom-cat, returning from an evening's hunting or love-making, strode forth from the undergrowth, tail waving proudly in air, inquisitive green eyes looking now here, now there. The creature paused a moment at the wall's base, gathered itself for a spring, then leaped upward with feline grace, catching the clustering ivy strands with gripping, claw-spiked feet, and lifted itself daintily to the wall-top, poising momentarily before making the downward jump to the yard beyond.

De Grandin stepped from his hiding-place and prepared to follow the cat's lead, but started back with an exclamation of dismay as the brute suddenly emitted an ear-piercing yowl of fear and agony, rose like a bouncing ball, every hair on its body stiffly erect, then catapulted like a hurled missile to the earth at our feet, where it lay twitching and quivering.

"Sacré sang d'un païen!" the Frenchman murmured, creeping forward and examining the rigid feline by the light of his electric torch. It was stone-dead, yet nowhere was there sign or trace of any wound or violence. "U'm," he commented, reaching out a tentative hand to stroke the dead animal's fur, then: *"Par la barbe d'un petit bonhomme!"* The hair was still bristling from the creature's hide, and as the Frenchman's fingers slipped over it a sharp, crackling sound, accompanied by tiny sparkling flashes, followed them.

"Ah? I wonder? Probably it is," he declared. Turning on his heel he hastened to the place where our car lay hidden, rummaged under the seat a moment, and dragged out the rubber storm-curtains. *"Mordieu,* my friend," he informed me with one of his elfish grins as he dragged the curtains through the underbrush, "never could I work one of those tops of the one man, but I think me these curtains come in handy for this, if for nothing else."

Once more bracing his feet against the wall, he drew himself up by the strong ivy, hung a moment by one hand while with the other he tossed the rubberized cloth across the top of the wall, then hoisted himself slowly, taking care to let his fingers come in contact with nothing not covered by the auto curtains.

"Up, Friend Trowbridge!" he extended his hand to me and drew me beside him, but: "Have a care, keep upon the curtains, for your life!" he

commanded as I gained the wall's top, then played the beam of his pocket flash along the bricks beside us. Running along the wall-top were four parallel wires, each supported at intervals of twenty feet or so by little porcelain insulators. But for the warning we received when the cat was killed, and de Grandin's forethought in fetching the rubber curtains, we should surely have been electrocuted the moment we scaled the wall, for the wires were so spaced that contact with at least one of them could not possibly be avoided by anyone attempting to scramble across the top.

Taking advantage of the ample shelter afforded by the great trees, we stole across the wide lawn and brought up at the house without incident. Nowhere was there any trace of occupancy, for all the windows were darkened, and, save for the night wind soughing through the towering evergreens, the place lay wrapped in graveyard silence. By a side door we found the big black car which had brought Laïla and Fräulein Mueller. Working rapidly, de Grandin unfastened the twisted wires with which the can of luminous paint was attached to the gas tank and tossed the nearly empty tin into an adjacent flower bed. This done, he considered the big machine speculatively a moment, then grinned like a mischievous boy about to perpetrate a prank. "Why not, *pour l'amour de Dieu?*" he demanded with a chuckle as he drew a wicked-looking case knife from his pocket and made four or five incisions in each of the vehicle's balloon tires close to the rims. As the air fled hissing from the punctured tubes he turned away with a satisfied laugh. "*Nom d'un canard,* but they shall blaspheme most horribly when they discover what I have done," he assured me as we continued our circuit of the house.

The tenants evidently placed implicit faith in their electrified wall, for there seemed no attempt to bar ingress, once the intruder had managed to pass the silent sentries on the wall-top. An unlatched window at the front of the building invited us to push our explorations farther, and a moment later we had let ourselves in, and, guided by cautious flashes from de Grandin's pocket light, were creeping down a wide central hall.

"Now, my friend," de Grandin whispered, "I wonder much which way leads to—*s-s-sh!*" he paused abruptly as a quick, nervous step sounded at the hall's farther end.

There was no time to reconnoiter the position, for the beam of our flashlight would surely betray our presence. Some four paces back we had passed a doorway, and, shutting off his light, de Grandin wheeled in his tracks, grasped my arm and dragged me toward it with all speed.

Fortunately the lock was unfastened and the knob turned soundlessly in his hand. Grasping his revolver, he took a deep breath, motioned me to silence, swung the door back and stepped softly into the room.

5

DARKNESS, black and impenetrable as a curtain of sable velvet, closed about us as we crossed the threshold. Dared we flash our light? Was there anyone hidden behind that veil of gloom, ready to pounce on us the moment we disclosed our position? We rested a moment, silently debating our next move, when:

"Doctor—Dr. Martulus"—a weak feminine voice quavered from the room's farther end—"I'll sign the paper. I'll go through the ordeal, only, for pity's sake, let me out. Don't let *him* visit me again. Oh, o-o-o-oh, I'll go insane if he comes again. Truly, I will!"

"Eh, what is this?" de Grandin demanded sharply, taking a hasty

step forward in the dark, then pressing the switch of his flashlight. *"Cordieu—pardonnez-moi, Madame!"* He shut the light off abruptly, but in its momentary beam we had beheld a sight which brought a gasp of astonishment to our lips. Tethered to the wall by a heavy chain and metal collar locked round her scrawny neck, nude save for a pair of broken felt house-slippers and a tattered and much soiled chemise, thin to the point of emaciation, a woman crouched sobbing and whimpering on the floor. She was no longer young, and almost certainly she had never been lovely, but her voice, for all its burden of misery and terror, was low-pitched and cultured, and her pronunciation that of a person of refinement.

"Your pardon, *Madame!"* de Grandin repeated, taking another step toward the wretched captive. "We did not know you were here. We——"

"Who are you?"

"Eh?"

"Aren't—aren't you Dr. Martulus? Oh, if you aren't, please, please take me away from this dreadful place! They've chained me to the wall here like a mad dog, and——"

"Pardon me, *Madame,"* de Grandin interrupted, "but who are *you?"*

"Amelia Mytinger."

"Teeth of the Devil! Not the Mademoiselle Mytinger who disappeared from her home a month ago, and——"

"Yes; I am she. A woman called Laïla the Seeress brought me here one night—I don't know how long ago it was. She told me I was possessed of a devil, and Dr. Martulus could cure me—I'd been suffering terribly from rheumatism and the doctors hadn't been able to help me much—and she said it was an evil spirit which plagued me. When they got me here they told me it was Mephistopheles himself who possessed me, and that I'd have to undergo a terrible ordeal by fire if I were ever to be rid of him. I could have hired a substitute, but she wanted ten thousand dollars, and I refused to pay it. I told them I'd undergo the ordeal myself, and they said I must sign a paper releasing them from all legal liability for possible injury I might suffer before they'd permit me to do it. When they brought the paper they wouldn't let me read it or even see any part of it except the space reserved for my signature, so——"

"Ah, ha," de Grandin muttered aside to me, "do you, too, not begin to sniff the odor of deceased fish in this business, Friend Trowbridge?"

"But they wouldn't let me go," the woman hurried on, ignoring his comment. "They said I was possessed of a devil and would bring terrible misfortune to everyone I met, so they took away my clothes and chained me here in this terrible place. I've never seen anyone from that night to this except Dr. Martulus, who comes once a day to feed me and ask if I've changed my mind about signing the paper, and——"

"'And'," de Grandin quoted irritably, "and what, if you please, *Mademoiselle?"*

"And the Devil!"

"Queue d'un sacré singe! The *which?"* he demanded.

"The Devil, I tell you. I never believed in a personal Devil before, but I do, now. Every night he comes to torture me. I see his horrible face shining through the dark and feel his awful claw touch me, and it burns like a white-hot iron. Oh, I'll go mad, if I haven't done so already!" She gasped laboringly for breath, then, as if a thought had suddenly struck her: "You mentioned my having disappeared—I didn't tell anybody I was going to Laïla's that night, I was ashamed to have it known I'd consulted a fortune-teller—but you said I'd been missed. Do the police know about me? Are you

from headquarters, by any chance. Will you save me? Oh, please, *please* take me away. I'm wealthy, I'll pay you anything you ask if only——"

"One moment, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin cut off her torrential speech. "I desire to think."

He remained immersed in thought a moment, then murmured softly, as though meditating aloud: "*Parbleu,* I see it all, now! As usual, Jules de Grandin was right. This *is* a gigantic conspiracy—a sort of Mephistopheles and Company, Limited. Yes, *pardieu,* limited only by these villains' capacity to invent devilish tricks to defraud defenseless women. *Mordieu,* this is infamous, this is monstrous, this must not be permitted! Me, I shall——"

His voice shut off abruptly, like a suddenly tuned-out radio, for a sharp *click* sounded from the doorway and something faintly luminous was shining face-high through the dark.

Nearer, nearer the fiery thing floated, and we were able to make out the lineaments of a long, thin, evil face; a face with spiked beard and pointed mustaches, with uprearing pointed eyebrows and crooked goat's horns growing from its forehead. That was all—no body, no neck—just the leering, demoniacal face floating forward through the blackness, its hideous, fire-outlined eyes gleaming with diabolical amusement as it neared the whimpering, cowering woman in the corner.

"O-o-o-h!" wailed the terrified spinster as she cringed against the wall and the grinning, satanic face bent above her.

"*Ugh!*" A short, surprized grunt answered her outcry, and the fiery face dropped downward through the dark like a burnt-out rocket falling to earth.

"Behold Satan's assistant, *mon ami,*" de Grandin commanded, a note of fierce elation in his whisper as he switched the beam of his pocket flash on the prostrate form at our feet.

A tall, broad-shouldered man, his face made up in imitation of the popular conception of the Devil, lay sprawled on the floor within the circle of the flashlight's glow. A long gash, bleeding freely, told where the blue steel barrel of de Grandin's heavy service revolver had struck as the Frenchman lashed the weapon downward through the dark with unerring aim and devastating force.

"*Eh bien,* my friend, we have met again, it seems," de Grandin remarked as he snatched away the makeup from the fellow's face and surveyed his features in the electric light. I started with surprize as I gazed into the unconscious one's countenance. He was the man who had demanded he be allowed to take Fräulein Mueller from us when we rescued her in the park.

As the flashlight switched off momentarily, the mock devil's beard and mustache became alive with glowing, smoking fire. Instantly I realized de Grandin's surmise had been correct. Phosphorus, or some kind of luminous paint, had been employed to make the faces of the men accosting the little Austrian girl glow as though aflame when they met her in the dark, and the same device had been used here to torture Miss Mytinger.

A further explanation lay at our feet, too, for beside the unconscious man's hand we found a queer-looking instrument. A moment's examination proved it to be something like an oversized flashlight, only, instead of a lamp, its tip was fitted with a metal plate on which the design of a devil's face surmounted by a reversed crucifix was soldered. As de Grandin pressed the switch actuating the contrivance we saw the design suddenly glow red-hot. To all intents the thing was a branding-iron which would burn its device on the flesh of anyone with whom it came in con-

tact. The mystery of Fräulein Mueller's disfigurement was solved. This, too, explained what Miss Mytinger meant when she spoke of Satan's "awful claw which burned like a white-hot iron" touching her during the diabolical visitations.

"*Bête—cochon!*" de Grandin muttered, turning the man over with a none too gentle foot. "Let us see what we can find upon his so filthy carcass." A hasty examination of the fellow's pockets disclosed a short-bladed dirk knife, a neat, business-like blackjack and a bunch of small keys. One of these fitted the lock of Miss Mytinger's iron collar, and de Grandin forthwith transferred the fetter from her neck to that of her late tormentor.

"Let us go," he admonished, as he stowed the loot from his fallen foeman's pockets in his own. "Thus far the luck has been with us, but he who tries heaven's patience too far ofttimes comes to grief." Stepping carefully, we crept from the darkened room into the dimly lighted hall.

6

"HAVE the care, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin warned as we started cautiously down the corridor, "a loose board may betray us, for—*ha?*"

Not fifteen feet ahead of us a door swung suddenly open and the menacing figure of a tall, black-bearded man stepped toward us. He was clad in a flame-colored robe on which was printed in black the figure of a prancing devil. A sort of diadem from which curving horns rose above his forehead gave his lean, cadaverous countenance a look of supernatural evil, and the wicked, sneering smile on his bony features completed the unpleasant picture.

Miss Mytinger gave a high-pitched squeal of terror. "Dr. Martulus!" she cried. "Oh, we're lost; he'll never let us go!"

De Grandin faced the other defiantly, his teeth bared in a grimace which was more a snarl than a grin. "We take this lady from out your damned, execrable house, *Monsieur le Diable,*" he announced truculently. "Have the goodness to stand aside, or——"

"*Nelzyá!*" the other retorted, raising a small Mauser automatic from the folds of his red robe.

"*Ha!* 'It can not be done,' do you say?" the Frenchman inquired sarcastically, and let drive with his heavy revolver, firing from the hip.

Too late he discovered his error. A crash of tinkling, shivering glass sounded, and the vision of the man in red dissolved before our eyes like a scene on a motion-picture screen when the film is melted in an overheated projector. A full-length mirror had been moved into the hall since we came through, and the man we had supposed before us was really at our back. De Grandin had been parleying with the fellow's reflection and—irony of ironies!—fired point-blank into the mirror, smashing it into a hundred fragments, but injuring his opponent not at all.

Like the echo of de Grandin's shot sounded the spiteful, whiplike report of the other's weapon. Jules de Grandin clapped his left hand to his right shoulder and dropped like an overturned sack of meal to the polished floor.

Two more figures joined the red-robed man. One of them burst into a roar of laughter. "*Ach,* dot vas a goot vun!" he chuckled. "He vas daking der lady from der house oudt, vas he? Now, berhabs, ve dake her back und giff her some more dime to dink ofer vedder she vill der baber sign or not. No?"

"No!—*Nom d'un porc*—NO!" de Grandin echoed, rolling over and rising on his elbow. The chuckling German swayed drunkenly in his tracks a moment, then crashed face

downward to the floor, and his red-robed companion fell across him in a heap of crumpled crimson draperies a split-second later as de Grandin's revolver bellowed a second time. The third man turned with a squeal of dismay and leaped half-way through the open door, then stumbled over nothing and slid forward on his face as a soft-nosed bullet cut his spinal cord in two six inches below his collar.

"See to Mademoiselle Mytinger, Friend Trowbridge!" de Grandin flung over his shoulder as, pistol in hand, he charged toward the doorway where his late antagonists lay. "Take her outside, I will join you anon!"

"Where are you going?" I objected. The thought of being separated in this uncanny house terrified me.

"Outside — *cornes et peau du diable!*—outside with you!" he shouted in answer. "Me, I go to find Mademoiselle Mueller and a certain souvenir."

7

The big front door was barred and double-locked. I swung to the right, traversed the room through which we had entered and hoisted the unlatched window a few inches higher. "This way, please," I told Miss Mytinger, pointing to the opening, "it's only a few feet to the ground."

She clambered over the sill and dropped to the soft turf below, and, after a futile look around for my friend, I lowered myself beside her.

"Quick, Friend Trowbridge," de Grandin's sharp whisper commanded even as my feet touched the grass. "This way—they come!"

His warning was none too early. Even as he grasped my arm and swung me into the shadow of a towering cedar, six men charged around the corner of the house, weapons in their hands and looks of fierce malignancy on their faces.

"*Sa-ha!*" de Grandin raised his revolver and fired, and the foremost of our assailants clapped his hand to his side, whirled half-way round, like a pirouting ballet-dancer, reeled suddenly to the left and slumped to the ground in an awkward heap. The man immediately behind stumbled over the fallen one's legs and fell forward with a guttural curse. De Grandin pressed the trigger again, but only a harmless click responded. The cylinder was empty, and five armed men faced us across a stretch of turf less than twenty feet wide.

Half turning, the Frenchman hurled his empty weapon with terrific force into the face of the nearest ruffian, who dropped with a scream, blood spurting from his nose and mouth, and grasped my elbow again. "This way, my friend!" he cried, seizing the Mytinger woman's arm with his free hand and rushing across the shaded lawn toward the narrow beach where the waters of Barnegat Bay lapped softly against the sand.

"Where's Fräulein Mueller?" I panted, striving to keep pace with him.

"Yonder!" he answered, and as he spoke a dark form detached itself from the shadow of a towering tree and joined us in flight.

Shouts and shots echoed among the evergreens behind us, but the short start we secured when the second man fell under the impact of de Grandin's hurled weapon enabled us to keep our lead, and, dodging among the shadows, we made steadily and swiftly toward the water.

"It's no use," Miss Mytinger informed us as the cool edges of the little wavelets moistened our feet and we swung toward the south, intent on rounding the edge of the walls surrounding the grounds on the landward side and doubling back to my car. "It's no use. The beach is full of quicksand. I heard them talking about it the night I came here. One

of their cows wandered down to eat the sea-grass and was sucked under before they could save her."

"On, my friend!" de Grandin answered through clenched teeth, for the strain was beginning to tell on him. "Better to perish in the quicksands than fall prey to those assassins."

We dashed along the waterline, heading for the beach beyond the wall, and a chorus of triumphant shouts followed us. Our pursuers had noted our course and made certain we rushed to our doom.

"*Parbleu,* what a chase!" de Grandin laughed pantingly, suddenly dropping to the sands and unfastening the lacings of his shoes.

"Yes, and it's not over yet," I reminded him. "They'll be on us in a moment. What's the idea—going paddling?"

"Observe me, my friend," he replied as he drew off his pale mauve socks and took shoes and stockings in hand, running barefoot ahead of us across the sands. "Follow where I lead." He advanced along the beach with long, swinging strides like those of a Canadian voyageur sweeping over a winter drift on his snow-shoes. "Jules de Grandin has been in many places," he flung back over his shoulder, "and one of them was the coast of Japan, where quicksands are thick as pickpockets at a fair. There it was I learned the ways of quicksand from the peasant fishermen. Like all other sand it looks, nor does it quake or tremble until it has its victim fast in its hold, but always it is colder than the sands about it, and the knowing one walking barefoot on the beach can feel its death-chilled borders before it is too late to draw back.

"Careful—to the right, my friends!" Gracefully, sliding one foot behind the other, like a dancer crossing a stage, he swerved inward from the water's edge, finally pausing a moment to feel the ground before him with a tentative toe. "*Très bon*—proceed. The quicksands reach no farther here," he announced, stepping forward with a confident stride.

Following his careful lead we proceeded the better part of a hundred yards when a sudden outcry behind us made me look round apprehensively. Infuriated by the sight of our escape, and assuming that because we had not perished the beach was safe for them, four of our enemies were rushing pellmell after us, the starlight glinting evilly on the weapons brandished over their heads.

"Hurry, de Grandin!" I urged. "They'll be up with us in a moment!"

"Will they, indeed?" he replied with cool indifference, seating himself on the soft sand and beginning to don his socks and shoes in a leisurely manner. "When they reach us, my friend, I shall be ready for them, I assure you."

"But," I remonstrated, "but—good Lord, man!—here they come!"

"Yes?" he answered, lighting a cigarette. "If you will trouble to look round, I think you will say 'there they go'."

Looking down the beach I saw the four pursuers hurrying forward, running four abreast, like a squad of soldiers going into action.

Suddenly the man to the left stumbled awkwardly, like a person descending a flight of stairs and coming to the end before he was aware of it. He faltered, raised his forward foot, as though feeling for support where there was none, and grasped the man next him.

The second man staggered drunkenly in the frenzied hold of his companion, floundered bewilderedly a moment—all four of them were doing a clumsy, grotesque dance, reeling from side to side, swaying back and forth, raising their arms spasmodically as though grasping at non-exist-

ent ropes dangling before them. But oddly, they seemed shrinking in stature, growing shorter and shorter, like inflated manikins from which the air is slowly escaping. They were melting, melting like bits of grease thrown into a heated frying-pan.

I shuddered in spite of myself. Even though they were conscienceless minions of a conscienceless master, stealers and torturers of defenseless women, I could not repress a feeling of nausea as the last of the four heads sank like a corkless bottle flung into a stream. A jet of sandy spray shot up from the level beach, a hand, opening and closing in a paroxysm of terror and despair, rose above the rippling sands, then all was still. The pale stars blinked unconcernedly down upon the bare stretch of smooth, unruffled beach and lapping, whispering water.

"*Tiens,* my friends," de Grandin flung away his cigarette and rose; "that appears to be that. Come, let us go."

"I CAN understand your wanting to rescue Fräulein Mueller, de Grandin," I remarked as we started on our homeward journey with the two women snugly stowed in the rear seat of my car, "but what was that remark you made about getting a souvenir when you left me in the hall?"

The little Frenchman's small white teeth gleamed under the line of his sharply waxed mustache as an elfish smile spread across his face. "Friend Trowbridge," he confided, "I have visited many interesting places in your so interesting country, but never yet have I lodged in a jail, nor am I wishful to do so. Think you I risked good money when I entrusted Mademoiselle Mueller to those villains' care? Not I. I did procure two thousand dollars in counterfeit bills with which she was to pay the wretches, and faithfully did I promise to return those notes to the police museum when I should have finished with them. It was to make good that promise that I left you in the hall."

"And Fräulein Mueller—had they released her when you found her?" I asked.

He suppressed a yawn. "Not quite," he returned. "They had her bound in a chair, and the lady called Laïla was standing guard over her with a wicked-looking knife when I entered. My friend, I greatly dislike manhandling a woman, but ladies who wish not to be mauled should not attempt to stick knives in Jules de Grandin. I fear I was forced to be less than entirely gentlemanly before I succeeded in releasing Mademoiselle Mueller and binding Laïla in the chair in her place. *Eh bien,* I tied her no tighter than was necessary to keep her in place until the police call for her."

"And——?"

"More speed and less conversation, if you please, my friend," he interrupted. "Your house is yet a long distance away, and there is nothing to drink this side of your so adorable cellar. Come, as you Americans say, stand hard upon the gas."

THE PURPLE SEA

BY FRANK OWEN

"She was weaving a golden thread of ecstasy from which there was no escape."

LEE GOONA lay upon the coral beach like a lifeless thing. His clothes were dripping with water and there were bits of seaweed clinging to his face. Every time a wave boomed up on the beach it broke in foam over his prostrate body, laving his face as though it were an elixir of life fighting to bring him back to consciousness. Again and again the water surged about him, toilsomely, endlessly. Utter solitude reigned. Not a sound broke the stillness except the booming of the waves.

Finally he opened his eyes. Everything swam giddily before his gaze. The universe was whirling round and round. To shut out the chaotic blur he closed his eyes again and rested. He clawed at the wet beach, reaching for life from the breast of the earth. For a few minutes he remained thus. Then slowly once more he gazed about him. Now the dizziness had lessened somewhat. He was able to make out objects dimly. Beyond him, beyond the rim of coral beach, stretched a fringe of palm-trees, the fronds of which stood out eerily against the sky. The whole sky was yellow, a pungent golden yellow, as though the sun had been a liquid globe that had suddenly burst, flooding everything in glistening splendor. Then he looked off toward the sea. Never had he beheld anything so fantastically beautiful. It was purple, as purple as the robes of kings. The foaming waves were as white as a trimming of ermine.

He had not the slightest idea where

he was. His head was throbbing as though a dynamo were whirring within it. Something had happened, something terrible, something frightful, but what it was his poor brain could not recollect.

Again the soft breakers foamed over him. They felt delightfully cool against his poor, tired body. Off on the far horizon he could dimly make out a ship, a yellow ship with all sails set against the yellow sky, riding slowly upon the swell of the purple sea. The sails glistened as though they were of gold, like gold clouds piled up against the yellow sky. It was very unnatural, but then even the sea was unnatural, and also the fringe of palm-trees beyond him.

He rose weakly to his feet and waved his arms. Perhaps the ship would send out a small boat to rescue him. And then he commenced to meditate. To save him from what, and for what? Was he on an island or on a part of the mainland of Asia? His head began to throb again. It was burning, as though his mind were on fire. Still the ship sailed onward in the distance, a ghost-ship, a phantom-ship, a ship of imagery and dreams.

He felt as though he were standing on the edge of things. He knew not which way to turn. Before him might yawn a frightful abyss. His predicament was similar to that of a man who has been flung off the earth onto a new planet. Of course his thoughts were wild, for he was on the verge of delirium. Had he been in a shipwreck? His past was blotted out utterly as though it had been drowned in the purple sea.

As he stood there an insane desire took possession of him to get out to that golden ship. He waved his hands. He cried and screamed and moaned. The tears streamed down his face. He babbled incoherently. He craved companionship. He was as frantic as a helpless child, a child ruthlessly torn from its mother's arms. He drooled at the mouth and prattled foolishly. Then he plunged into the purple sea. He would try to swim out to the golden ship. But the sea was gentle. He was seized in the soft arms of the waves and carried up onto the beach again. Time after time he fought his way into the water only to be washed back upon the beach.

At last he grew more calm. Some semblance of peace crept over him. With a sigh of weariness he threw himself at full length upon the sand. Now the purple of the sea was less vivid. It verged toward a bluish tone. The yellow haze of the sky grew more subdued. The glare lessened. But still the ship of the golden sails stood out upon the horizon like a lovely golden bird.

Lee Goona resigned himself to his fate. He was lost. Perhaps he was on an island without food or companionship. He was helpless. He fought to keep his nerves from again slipping beyond control. He decided that he would explore the country around him, but before doing so he would remain on the beach until the golden ship had faded from sight. It was too bad that he was unable to signal her, but he did not even have a match to light a fire even if he had had wood whereof to build it.

And then suddenly as he gazed off toward the far horizon he gave a start. The golden ship had veered in her course. He rubbed his eyes. Surely his vision was false! But no. The golden ship was sailing directly toward him. Of course it was still a great way out. Even now he might only be imagining that she was sailing toward the coral beach.

For a few minutes he gazed at the ship, spellbound. A great joy was rising within him. He tried to stifle it down, fearing it might only end in disappointment. If the ship changed her course now,

his reason would snap. It would be frightful to have his hopes aroused only to be flung back into a bottomless abyss of despair.

Gradually as he watched the oncoming ship he realized that there could be no more doubt of the fact that he would soon be rescued. He felt like shouting for sheer delight. Not even for a complete day had he remained on the island. He assumed that it was a coral island because of the formation of the beach. Now the ship was close enough to launch a small boat. A half-dozen sailors climbed over the side. At once they bent to their oars. The small boat swept toward him rapidly. In a few moments it had been beached.

LEE GOONA gazed at the occupants of the boat. They were all ugly, as ugly as it seemed possible for human men to be. There was a suggestion of the Asiatic about their faces, the high cheek-bones and the flat noses. But they were not Chinese. They suggested a mongrel admixture. One was black. They looked extremely ferocious, but Lee Goona did not mind. They were there to rescue him; nothing else mattered. Without a word he climbed into the small boat and soon he was being rowed out toward the golden ship.

The sails gleamed more dazzlingly than ever as they neared it. Lee Goona grasped the rope ladder as the small boat came abreast and at once clambered up to the deck. The ship was far less inviting when he found himself on board. It was true that the sails still gleamed golden, but the ship and the deck itself were painted a dismal black, as though they had been painted with tar or road oil. Still he was on board, and that was much. He did not expect a private yacht.

As Lee Goona surveyed his surroundings the captain came ambling toward him. He was a great giant of a man. His face was not ugly, but strong. His square jaw betokened an indomitable will. His eyes were shaded by eyebrows bushy and black. They perhaps emphasized the piercing blackness of his eyes. He looked like a god of the mountains, as powerful as an Atlas or a Jupiter.

"Well, now you are here," he said, "are you satisfied?" He laughed shortly, harshly, as he spoke—a laugh that was at strange variance to the rich, full, pleasant tone of his voice.

"I am more than satisfied," replied Lee Goona emphatically. "On that island I scarcely knew what was in store for me."

The captain smiled. "And do you know now?" he asked.

"No," admitted Lee Goona, "but at least I am among human beings."

"Do not use that term too carelessly," advised the captain. "In these wondrous days of advancement, of education and civilization, it is doubtful if anyone is really human. The recent war proved that. However, what matter? I am glad that you appreciate being on this ship. I hope your attitude lasts."

OF THE voyage on that golden ship, volumes might be written—weird, unpleasant volumes which would not be agreeable to muse over. Lee Goona was assigned to a bunk in the forecastle, as dirty a bunk as could be imagined, a bunk nauseating beyond description, over which hordes of insects crawled. It was as though all the elegance of the ship were in the sails. The rest was reeking, rotting and vile beyond description. The food was of the commonest. Fish and biscuits, endlessly. The animal-like crew sat about the table and gorged the food. They tore off the fish in great chunks and crunched the biscuits noisily. A few there were who preferred the fish raw, and the oil and grease drooled from their lips.

Lee Goona was rather fastidious in his eating, and the sight revolted him. He was a devotee of cleanliness and there were times when the filth and insect life on the ship made him regret that he had left the coral beach. Starvation would be preferable to this beastlike existence.

And yet the captain interested him. His name was Jimber Jawn, and when the spirit moved him he could relate stories, legends and adventures in a magical manner.

Sometimes he stood for hours against the rail discussing things in the most affable manner. Other times there were when his face was black and somber and Lee Goona was afraid to address him.

"It is interesting to have someone to talk to who has at least a glimmering of intelligence," declared Jimber Jawn. "The rest of the animals on board can not visualize anything above gluttony."

Just when a great fear commenced to grip Lee Goona it was hard to say. Perhaps it was the logical result of endless days at sea in that reeking black hulk with the gorgeous golden sails. Or perhaps it was the fetid air, the crawling things and the frightful wrangling that forever polluted the forecastle. Whatever the cause, fear gripped him. Sometimes in the depth of the night he sprang up in his bunk, wide-eyed, terrified, shaking from head to foot. Some uncanny thing had stirred his slumbers. Had he heard a scream? Or was it merely the dreams of his subconscious mind? For hours he would lie afraid to close his eyes, and yet there was nothing more loathsome about the forecastle than there was on any other night.

Never while on board was he given any work to do. He helped at times at various tasks, but these were purely voluntary. Jimber Jawn talked with him a great deal. It could not be said that they became friends, because there was an aloofness about the captain that was hard to explain.

One night Jimber Jawn came to him in great excitement. "Quick," he directed, "follow me if you value your life." As he spoke he walked across the deck and lifted one of the steel hatches that led to the yawning blackness of the hold. "Climb down the rope ladder," continued Jimber Jawn hurriedly.

The tone of his voice was such that Lee Goona could not have dared to argue with him. He was well aware of the surging fury that lay hidden in the stalwart body of Jimber Jawn. Once one of the ugliest of the mongrel crew had crossed the captain; for one brief instant Jimber Jawn had stared at the cringing sailor; the next moment his great arm shot out. Lee Goona could never forget the cold thud of that blow, the sound of breaking bones, the low groan of the poor victim as he crashed to the deck. What had happened afterward he dreaded to ponder over. Such violence in a blow seemed unbelievable. It was not the blow of a human being but of some frightful, steel-like Frankenstein. Less than an hour later Jimber Jawn had talked to him delightfully of the comparative difference between Chinese and Japanese poetry.

Now, as Lee Goona was ordered down into the hold, he did as he was told. Jimber Jawn's tone, despite his evident excitement, was affable; but calm too is the air immediately preceding a typhoon. He was far from being a coward, but for the life of him he could not have protested against going.

The hold of the ship was as black and hot as the crater of a volcano. There was not the faintest crack of light. It was as awesomely black as the extreme of the ocean's depths. The rats scampered about him screeching and howling. They

drowned the sounds of the happenings on deck. Once a great slimy rat scampered across his hand, leaving a streak of nauseating dampness upon it. He had been crouching on the floor, but at the touch of the dank skin he sprang to his feet with a startled cry.

All that day a storm had been brewing, and now it struck. Pandemonium raged upon the deck. In the blackness, Lee Goona wondered what evil deeds were being done. Was he aboard a pirate ship? An opium smuggler? Or was she engaged in slave-traffic? He did not know. Surmise as he would, he had no way of telling. The ship was groaning and moaning. Her beams were cracking under the pressure of the mighty waves. She rolled about at such a pitch that Lee Goona had trouble in keeping his feet. At last she rolled more ominously than ever, and he crashed to the floor, striking his head as he fell.

For a while he lay stunned. The rats screeched and screamed. They came and ran over his body in hordes. It was the patter of their cold, damp feet over his face that brought him to his senses. With a shriek which the roar of the wind drowned, he sprang to his feet, striking out blindly at the loathsome animals. In the darkness he crushed some beneath his feet. He was in a frenzy of loathing. His very flesh seemed to creep away from his bones. His head ached dully. No matter how hard he tried, he could not make out a single thing in that well of blackness. The fetid air was frightful. He gasped for breath. Hotter and hotter it seemed to grow. To a great extent the increase in intensity of the heat was attributable to his nerves. He was on the verge of fever. If the heat continued it would burn him alive.

When all hope had died within him, the moaning and groaning of the ship ceased. Evidently the storm had passed, or at least lessened considerably. It was a relief to be able to keep his feet. At last there came a draft of fresh air. The hatch had been opened. The next moment Jimber Jawn appeared at the top of the rope ladder. He held a lantern far above his head.

"Come on up!" he cried, and his voice was as friendly as Lee Goona had ever heard it.

It was some time before Lee Goona's eyes could get used to the light on deck. For now the storm had passed completely and a pale yellow moon hung low in the sky. It lighted up the deck as though dawn had already broken. It created a street of golden light on the purple sea that stretched off to imagined isles of romance. It was a moment of superb beauty. The golden sails were set. They stood out clear-cut against the soft blue of the sky. He was surprized that the sails had not been lowered. Surely the ship had not ridden under full sail through that terrific storm! It was unnatural. But then the ship itself was unnatural, as unnatural as the purple tint of the sea.

He turned from the beauty of the moon to the stark black deck. In the moonlight, pools of what appeared to be blood glistened. Near by a human monstrosity stood and glared at him. The man's face was disfigured as though he had been mauled, and blood dripped from his lips. Another sailor near by had blood about his lips also; and as Lee Goona gazed upon him he extended a tongue that might have been that of a wolf, and licked the blood from his face. The act was bestial, for he seemed to lap up the blood with relish. Lee Goona had an uncomfortable feeling that the blood-stains had not been caused by the man's own wounds.

Beyond him several musicians were playing softly on mandolins. They

were crooning sweet melodies, songs of love and enchantment. As Lee Goona turned, he beheld a gorgeous golden girl, a China girl of surpassing beauty, dressed in a single garment of sheer silk that was drawn tightly about her. It, too, was golden, and it emphasized the glorious perfection of her slender body. Jimber Jawn stood over her. He was breathing heavily.

"Dance!" Jimber Jawn cried tensely. "Dance!"

Lee Goona walked over and squatted down on the deck beside Jimber Jawn. Here was drama—gorgeous, romantic drama fit for kings.

The slender girl gazed about her in bewilderment as though in that rabid throng she sought one face that held a ray of hope for her. And it so happened that her eyes met those of Lee Goona and stayed for a fractional minute. His expression had not changed, but a message had been flashed between them. Call it telepathy or what you will, it was enough. A bit of the strained expression left her face. She even smiled slightly, a smile that was all for Lee Goona, showing teeth more even and white than Ceylonese pearls.

And then she danced, danced as no girl ever danced before. Her gorgeous, golden, glowing body swayed in the breeze like a young elm. A suggestion of sandalwood sweetened the air. She was wooing Lee Goona through her dancing. She was weaving a golden web of ecstasy about him from which there was no escape. Through her dancing she was imploring him to save her.

No artist ever painted a picture more wondrous, more vivid than that black ship with the golden sails against the deep blue sky. The sheen of the orange moon upon the purple sea made a fantasy of it. And above all in perfection and glory that perfect golden girl, dancing. Every line of her slender figure was poetry more rare than the verses of Tai-Ta-mien.

Some time later Lee Goona sat in the stern of the ship. Absolute quietude reigned on board, unbroken save by the soft swish of the water against the sides of the ship and the occasional sighing of the wind against the sails. The moon was very low in the west. It was dipping into the sea beyond the far horizon. Only half of it still showed. It arched like a golden-orange doorway that led to realms of witchery. His head throbbed. His brow was flaming. If only he could plunge into the cool soft stillness of the purple sea! What mattered that oblivion might follow? He would be willing to be sucked down to the ocean's depths by death if only for the joy of floundering for a moment in the clear, cool water. He had to exert every effort not to slip overboard. That night romance had wrapped itself about his soul. It was a night of perfume, of hushed music and rare love. He could not bear the thought of going down into that foul, reeking cabin, putrid with vermin and beasts of men. He wished to remain on deck to dream. Who was this gorgeous, golden girl who had so suddenly appeared upon the ship? He remembered that he had been locked in the hold for hours. When he climbed back on deck there had been pools of blood about, and there had been blood, too, about the mouths of many of the seamen. Evidently there had been a fight, a fight for possession of that glorious golden girl. One glance at her had kindled the blood in Lee Goona like old wine. Naught remained to him now but to rescue that girl, to carry her off to some jewel-like coral isle where he could spend his days in poetry and his nights watching her dance in the moonlight upon the coral beach. His thoughts were wild and mad, though no madder than life itself had grown to be. Nothing real existed any

longer. All was fantasy and wraiths. Ghosts are only the dreams that men have had.

Lee Goona glanced up quickly as there came a soft step on the deck beside him. He rose to his feet and stared in rapture at the lovely golden girl. At last she had come to him. Nothing must ever separate them now. To him she was the sun and the stars. She was the light of his life, the dream-girl that destiny had sent into his arms.

As he drew her to him, her fragrant hair brushed his cheek. There was music in the touch. In that moment he found the answer to the reason for existence over which he had pondered all his life. He kissed her warm lips, and the very breeze paused as he did so. It was the divine moment when their souls reached out to grasp each other. It was more than physical desire. There was something deeply spiritual about it.

Suddenly as they stood thus the girl uttered a frightened cry. She sprang away from him as Jimber Jawn reached their side. His face was working convulsively. The muscles stood out in knots on his bared arms. Lee Goona had no time to defend himself. He was caught unmercifully in those crushing arms and lifted high in the air as though his weight had been infinitesimal. For one brief instant Jimber Jawn paused, undecided whether to crash him to the deck and crush him beneath his heel as he might a viper. Lee Goona's fate hung by a thread. Then came the decision. Jimber Jawn flung him far over the rail into the purple sea. The waters closed above his head, delightfully cool. It was the sensation for which he had yearned. It was calm, restful. He felt like closing his eyes in immortal sleep.

Meanwhile the golden girl had climbed to the ship's rail. Even as Jimber Jawn reached for her she leaped into the sea, uttering a cry of grim delight, of deliverance. Lee Goona beheld her slim body strike the water. It aroused him from his lethargy. It brought him to a realization of their dire predicament. He was awake at last. He started to swim toward the golden girl.

But she was in no danger. She was swimming with the sure strokes of one used to the water from infancy. In the distance a fringe of palm-trees could be faintly discerned in the moonlight. Together they set off for the distant shore. Whatever the future might hold for them, they would not return to the black ship of the golden sails. Better to risk death in the purple sea than to face death at the hands of Jimber Jawn. Lee Goona knew that his life would be the penalty if he ever encountered the irate captain again.

For the next half-hour they cut through the water like fish. The moon had dipped from view and the stars seemed doubly bright, like lovely lanterns of the approaching dawn. Despite all that he could do, Lee Goona felt unconsciousness creeping over him. Whether it was sleep or the result of shocked nerves he neither knew nor cared. Either spelled death. Unless he could keep his eyes from closing, all hope was gone. Yet his eyes continued to close. He bit his lips till the blood came, so that the pain might keep him awake. But it was useless. Slowly, persistently, sleep crept over him. Finally he lost consciousness. The waters of the purple sea closed softly over his head. And all was blackness, as black as the putrid hold of the ship of the golden sails.

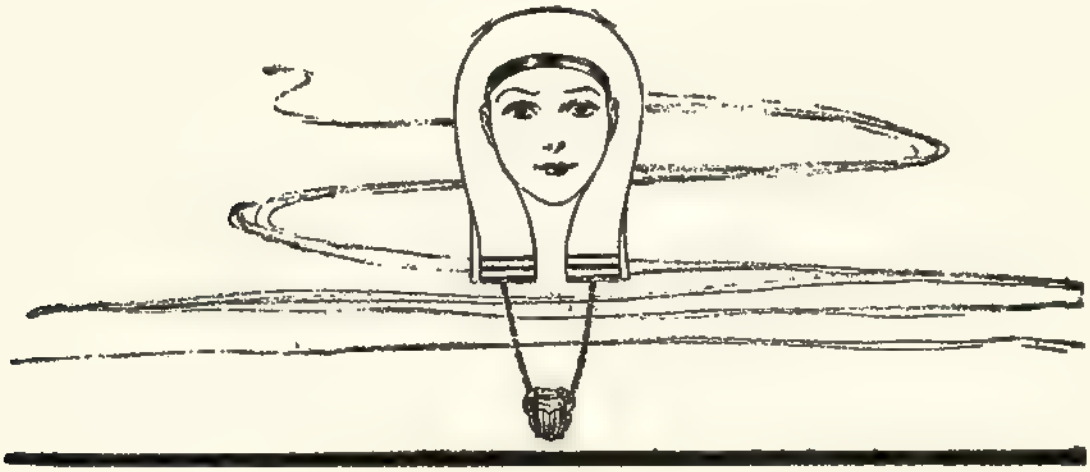
When Lee Goona opened his eyes he lay on a coral beach. Beyond him stretched a fringe of palm-trees whose fronds stood out in strong silhouette against the yellow, golden haze of the sky. Before him lay the

purple sea, white breakers booming softly upon the coral sand.

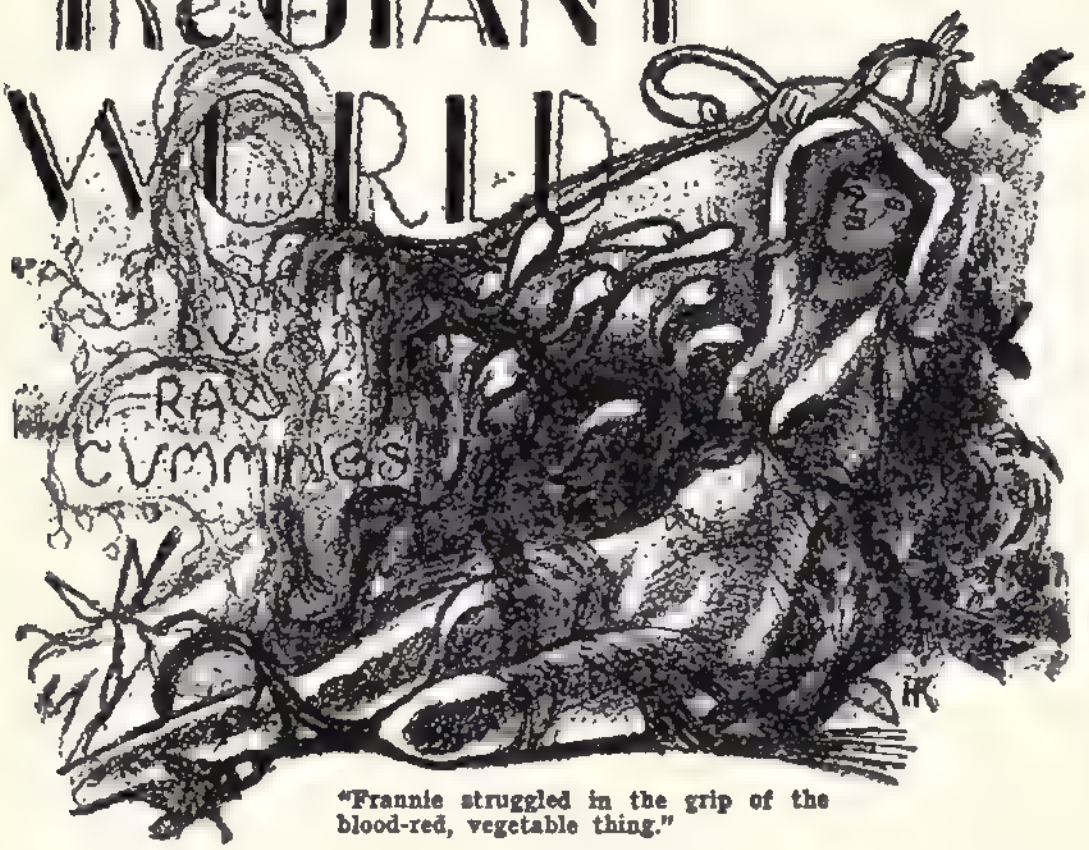
He rose to a sitting posture and rubbed his eyes. Gradually the truth dawned upon him. For hours or maybe days he had lain delirious upon the beach. The ship of the golden sails, Jimber Jawn, the lovely girl, all were but figments of his imagination, of his delirium. None of them existed. It was devastating to realize that he had fallen in love with an exquisite girl who existed only in his delirium. His life was ruined. He had returned to reality. Reality was a curse. His head still throbbed as though someone were playing a steady tattoo upon it. Bit by bit memory returned to him, fragmentary but credible. He was Lee Goona, a tea-merchant with offices in Canton, Tokio and in several of the islands lying near Formosa. He had been returning to Canton from his island stations when a terrific typhoon had seized the ship, tossed it about as though it had been a cork, and finally crushed it against a rock-reef as though it had been paper. What followed after that he could not remember. Evidently he had been washed by the waves upon this coral beach. And it was at this point that his delirium commenced. He had never beheld a ship with golden sails standing out like a bird against the yellow sky. All the ensuing imagery had been purely fantasies surging through his distorted mind. They did not exist, but they had played havoc with his life. He was in love with a beautiful dream. His head still throbbed. If it would only burst and put an end to that existence which had become a curse! The sight of the purple sea under the yellow sky was nauseous to him.

In despair he turned toward the fringe of palms. As he did so he beheld a figure coming toward him, the figure of his gorgeous golden girl. She waved her hand to him and she was smiling. What it meant, he could not tell. Had the thread of his reason snapped again? For now the fantasy had become the real. He could not explain it, nor did he try, for the wondrous girl was nestling in his arms and he was kissing lips more fragrant than wild cherries.

"We are saved," she whispered softly. "There is a friendly settlement of pearl divers on the other side of the island, and once a week a trading-schooner stops there en route to old Canton.



The GIANT WORLD



"Frannie struggled in the grip of the blood-red, vegetable thing."

The Story Thus Far

To rescue Brett Gryce, who has been gone four years on a voyage to a distant world, his sister Frannie and his brother Martt, with Frank Elgon, go to that distant world in a space-vehicle that can travel through space and time. They find Brett, who is to be married to Leela, the daughter of Greedo the musician. The people celebrate the occasion, but while the wedding ceremonies are in progress, a giant appears in the lake, wading toward them. In the resultant confusion and panic, they get separated. Brett and Frank find Frannie (Brett's sister) and Leela, but the two girls dwindle away until they disappear from sight into smallness before the horrified gaze of the two men. They have been forced by two of the giants to swallow some of the size-changing drug. Martt and Zee (Leela's sister) find a sail-boat and go across the lake in pursuit of the giants who have captured Frannie and Leela. They reach the city of Reaf, only to find that the giants have carried Frannie and Leela up into largeness unfathomable to their own world. At Reaf, a loathsome, whimpering, luminous beast that babbles human words and has its eye on a long stalk instead of a head, blunders into Martt. He attacks it, and the snoring of the giant left on guard in Reaf warns him of still more serious danger. The hideous, whimpering beast poises itself for a spring, and leaps upon Martt.

CHAPTER 4

THE WILD NIGHT RIDE

FRANNIE forced her way out of the crowded arcade, with its struggling, panic-stricken occupants. She was confused, terrified. Separated from me, and then from Martt, her only idea was to find us again; or find Brett. Outside the arcade she turned aimlessly to where the crowd momentarily was least dense. Panic-stricken people—all strangers. Then she saw Leela in the shadow of a doorway of the arcade, and ran to her.

"Leela! What is it? What has happened?"

People around them were shouting. Leela said, "Giants. There is a giant

off there in the lake. I was looking for Brett. He came out here. Oh, Frannie——"

The two girls clung to each other. It was dark where they stood. At the moment the crowd had surged the other way. Suddenly Frannie became aware of a dark form looming beside her. A man twice the size of herself. She tried to scream, but a great palm went over her face. She felt herself being jerked from her feet. . . .

She half fainted; recovered to find herself in a thicket within a few feet of the arcade. Leela was beside her. Leela panted, "Don't scream, Frannie! They'll—kill us if we scream!"

The man was with them, and a thick-set lump of a woman. Not so large now. Almost normal in size, for they were dwindling. The man was naked to the waist, a gray-white, barrel-like chest matted with hair. A face, fearsome with menacing eyes, and a head of matted black locks.

And in the thicket were four horned animals; saddled, like large horses with spreading antlers. The animals were dwindling. . . .

The man rasped a command at Leela. From his belt he drew small pellets, white like tiny pills of medicine. He thrust one at Leela, forced it down her throat. Leela gasped, "You must take it, Frannie. He says—it is harmless—but if we resist —he will kill."

Then the man thrust his fingers into Frannie's mouth, his arm holding her roughly. She gulped, swallowed. It was an acrid taste. . . .

The man pushed her roughly from the thicket. And pushed Leela. His triumphant laugh was the rasp of a file on metal. Leela and Frannie stumbled to the wall of the arcade, stood clinging together. And suddenly, with the realization of what was upon her, Leela screamed. And Frannie screamed, though she did not yet understand.

A wave of nausea possessed Frannie. Her head was reeling. Voices sounded near by—familiar men's voices. My voice, and Brett's! We came running at the sound of the screams.

Frannie held tight to the swaying Leela as Brett and I rushed up. And I took Frannie in my arms. Brett was demanding, "Leela, what is it? You're not hurt, are you? What is it?"

Frannie wanted to try and tell me. "Frank—oh——" She choked; her throat was constricted.

And then Frannie really knew! Within my arms she felt herself shrinking! Growing smaller; but it was not so much that; rather was it that my encircling arm was expanding, holding her more loosely.

With the horror of it, Brett and I stood apart. Frannie's nausea was passing; her head was steadier, but dizzy with the strange movement of the scene around her. She clung to Leela, and, of everything within her vision, only Leela was unchanging. The wall of the arcade was slowly passing upward; its nearer corner was moving slowly away; Brett and I were growing. Our waists reaching to Frannie's head; and then our knees. She gazed upward to where, fifteen or twenty feet above her, our horrified faces stared down.

The mind always takes its personal viewpoint. Frannie and Leela were dwindling into smallness. But now that the nausea and dizziness were past, to them, they alone were normal. Everything else seemed changing . . . the whole scene, growing gigantic. . . .

It was a slow, crawling growth—a steady, visible movement. The ground beneath their feet was a fine white sand. To Frannie's sight this patch of sand had originally been some ten feet, with the arcade wall on one side, and a thicket on the other. But the ground was shifting

outward with herself as a center. Under her bare feet she could feel its steady movement—drawing outward, shifting so that her feet were drawn apart. She had to move them constantly.

Beside her now she saw my foot and ankle as large as herself; the towering shafts of my legs—my face a hundred feet or more above her. The arcade wall stretched up almost out of sight—lantern-flowers loomed up there like great colored suns. . . . The thicket was a hundred feet away—a tangle of jungle.

Then Frannie saw the giant Brett reach down and pick Leela up on his hand—saw Leela whirled gasping into the air. A moment, then Brett set her gently back on the ground. She was some twenty feet from Frannie. She ran, half stumbled across the rough white ground until again the girls were together.

The arch of my sandaled foot was now as tall as Frannie. The arcade wall was very distant; the thicket was a blur in the distance. That small patch of white sand had unrolled to a great stony plain. Rough; yellow-white stones strewn everywhere. Frannie saw my feet and Brett's—as large as the arcade once had been—moving away with great surging bounds up into the air and back. A boulder was near by—a rock as tall as Frannie. It was visibly growing. She gripped Leela—together they crept to the boulder's side, huddled there.

But they could not remain still. The boulder was expanding. It towered over them; but it was drawing away as well, for the ground was expanding. Constantly they shifted their position to remain close to it, to huddle under its protecting curve. It had been a rock taller than their heads; it was now a mountain. It loomed above them—a bulging cliff-face of naked, ragged rock.

Then it was no longer moving. Everything now had steadied; the ground was motionless. A normality came to Leela and Frannie. Their terror faded into apprehension, and a desire, a determination to do what they could to help themselves. They stood up and looked around them.

II

They were in the midst of a vast, rock-strewn plain, illumined by a half twilight. It seemed miles in extent—a rolling country of naked rock over which, for a sky, hung a remote murk of distance. A naked landscape, rolling upward to a circular horizon, with the circular mountain of rock standing beside them at its center.

Leela now seemed quite calm. She said, "We are not unfathomably small. Too small for Brett to see us, but not if he gets a glass to magnify. He will mark the spot where we are—he will do something, Frannie—we must not be too much frightened."

There seemed nothing that they could do to help themselves. No use to wander; though no great harm either, for they could roam for miles over this rocky waste to cover no more than a foot or two of the white sand Brett would be guarding.

To Frannie's imagination came the thought of insects! A crawling ant in that white sand would now be a monster gigantic! She gazed around in terror, but there was nothing of the kind in sight.

A desolate landscape, empty of movement. Frannie's heart leaped. In the distance something was moving! She gripped Leela.

"There's something out there—something moving out there!"

Tiny moving specks. Too terrified to run, the girls stood staring. A mile or two away, specks were moving across the rocky plain. They seemed coming nearer. They separated into

four specks. Four gray blobs, coming swiftly forward.

In a few moments they were distinguishable. Four running animals, bounding, leaping over the rocks. Animals with horns. Two of them running free; two with riders.

Leela gasped, "That's the giant! And the woman! They're coming to find us!"

For a moment the two girls stood transfixed, heedless that they would be discovered. To Frannie came the thought: The giant, the woman and the four animals had been dwindling. They had stood in the thicket, hiding from Brett. They were coming from the thicket now, riding over the vast rocky plain headlong to regain their captives. Brett could not see them; they were too small. Brett was probably standing a few feet from here on the sand—afraid to come closer for fear of treading upon the girls; and those few feet were miles away across this naked desert.

The four animals came leaping forward. They ran low to the ground, necks extended like huge dogs on a trail. Already they were no more than half a mile away. The figures of the riding man and woman showed plainly. They all seemed about normal size as compared to Frannie and Leela.

Abruptly Frannie recovered her wits. "We must hide! They must not find us!"

They hid, out of sight around a corner of the lower rock-face of the mountain; crouched, waiting with wildly beating hearts.

But it was useless. Either they had been seen or the animals scented them. Soon they heard the man calling his mount. No noise of galloping hoofs, for the beasts ran lightly on padded feet. A moment, then the animals burst into view around the jutting rock; bounded up and stopped before the crouching girls.

The man dismounted. His grin was a leer of triumph. He spoke to Leela—a harsh, guttural command in her own language, as he had spoken before when he forced the drug upon her.

Leela dragged herself to her feet, and Frannie after her. The man spoke again. Less harshly this time, and at greater length. He gestured at Frannie.

Leela said, with a quiver in her voice that she tried to hold to calmness, "He tells me that his name is Rokk. This woman here is his mate—he calls her Mobah. He says they come from a very big world—down here to our world of infinite smallness. Oh, Frannie, what can we do? He says they are going to take us with them, up there to that Giant World."

Frannie, too, strove for calmness. "Ask him—why? What harm have we done to him? Tell him—we don't want to go——"

Leela turned to this man who had called himself Rokk. Then she appealed to the woman—but the woman stared dumbly and turned away.

"Frannie—he says we will learn later what he wants. He says—we will not be harmed if we cause no trouble. We are going—he says he is going to take us——"

"Which way?" Frannie interrupted.

"I don't know. I suppose to Reaf."

"Ask him."

Leela asked him. "Yes, by way of Reaf. He says we will mount the animals—he calls them dhranes. They run very swiftly—as Brett describes your wolves of the northern ice-fields of your Earth."

Frannie demanded, "He says we go to Reaf?"

"Yes. We will cross the island—out the lagoon—riding the dhranes as they swim."

Memory of the island—the arcade—the lagoon and the lake came to

Frannie. The island! It seemed so remote, so gigantic. This vast rocky waste surrounding them now was only a small patch of white sand beside the arcade wall.

She said swiftly, "Leela, ask him how we can ever do that when we are so small? Why, it must be hundreds of miles—for us in this size—just to reach the shore of the island."

"I told him that. He said, 'Of course.' He said he has been riding from the thicket ever since he got small enough to avoid Brett's sight. While they were still diminishing they were riding. He was afraid Brett would see them—but he had to take that chance."

"I mean," said Frannie breathlessly, "tell him we must get larger. It is too far in this small size. Tell him you know the island and the lake well—we will help him escape——"

Leela nodded eagerly. "So that if we get large, Brett may see us?"

"Yes. Try and get him to make us large at once—now. Tell him we'll help him——"

Rokk grinned sardonically at Leela's words. Leela turned to Frannie in chagrin.

"He says he will do as he thinks best—and we will do as we are told."

Rokk added another command. Leela said, "We must mount the dhranes, Frannie. I think we had better do as he says—and not talk. Can you ride a saddle like that?"

From Frannie's viewpoint, the dhranes were now about the size of small horses — four-legged, long-haired, shaggy beasts with crooked, wide-spreading antlers. They moved as though on springs. Frannie was reminded by their movements of giant leopards she had seen in cages on Earth. But they seemed gentle, docile enough. The saddles were oblong, padded with fur, with a high and a low foot-rail, both upon the same side, on which the rider's feet could rest.

"I can ride that," said Frannie; and nimbly mounted. There was no bridle; Frannie leaned forward and clutched the antlers. Leela mounted. Rokk moved his dhrane about by spoken words, and by slapping its haunches with his hands.

Leela said, "He is going to give us some of the drug, Frannie. Some now—to make us larger. But before we are very large he says we will be beyond the arcade, in the woods where Brett can not see us. We will ride very fast——"

The animals lapped their drug eagerly. The man and woman took theirs, with Leela and Frannie. To Frannie again came a moment of nausea—a reeling of the senses. But it was quickly passed.

Rokk shouted. Frannie tensed herself. The dhrane under her bounded forward. The ride began.

III

At first Frannie clung tensely to the antlers; but soon she found it was not necessary to do so. The dhrane ran with long, smooth bounds; sure-footed on the rocks as a chamois, noiseless, lithe as a great cat. It ran, with head extended, low to the ground; beneath her, Frannie could feel the play of its smooth muscles, rippling under its shaggy skin.

The woman Mobah rode her dhrane behind Frannie. Leela was directly ahead, with Rokk leading. In single file they bounded forward. Leela's black hair and draperies flew in the wind. She rode, bending forward, her body loosely responsive to the animal's bounds.

The wind of their forward movement sang in Frannie's ears. The ground fled by under her with a blur of yellow movement. And all around her was the murky night, rushing at her, passing, and closing in behind.

A wild, night ride like the fairy dream of a child. Wild, and free . . . a fairy dream. . . .

An exaltation was upon Frannie; she urged her mount to greater speed. And thought of the drug she had taken. . . .

The drug was acting. The rushing night seemed shrinking. Everywhere the murk was contracting. The ground was smoothing and turning from its yellow to white. Overhead a remote—very remote—spot of red light shone like a dying sun in the heavens. A lantern-flower! Frannie's heart leaped with triumph. They were growing larger. . . .

She heard Rokk shout to his dhrane; felt her own mount stretch closer to the ground as the speed was increasing. The rushing night contracting . . . they seemed riding up . . . and up . . . the ground, the night was shrinking under them. . . .

A wild, night ride up through a fairy's dream . . . it seemed endless. Wildly free, with the exaltation of a child's fancy upon it. . . .

Frannie became aware that the vast rocky plain was shrunken to a smoother level. And ahead now, she saw a great forest, with colored suns about it. Soon they were in the forest. A jungle. Flat, orange stalks of grass twenty feet high. The dhranes bounded through them. Shaggy outlines of tree trunks, each vast as a mountain. They rose into unfathomable murky distance overhead. But these were all dwindling. The giant jungle was shrinking . . . passing slowly, but ever faster.

A fantasy . . . the dream of a child. . . .

Rokk called again. Their pace slackened. Frannie saw an open space ahead. Coarse white sand—a patch of it half a mile in extent. Beyond it a broad beach. Water shining off there. The lake, with stars above it.

The dhranes ran more slowly. The white open space shrank as they traversed it. The beach rushed at them. It had narrowed. Frannie saw it as almost of normal aspect—the narrow shore of the island. The lake was starlit—beautiful.

Rokk paused a moment at the water's edge. Frannie gazed around. The woods were behind them. A large, dark tree-trunk was near by on the shore. Frannie gazed that way idly; and though she did not know it, Martt and Zee were crouching there, staring with a confused fascination. A moment. The shore shrunk further; the water had advanced to lap the stamping, impatient feet of the dhranes. Rokk spoke softly. His dhrane waded in, with the others following.

Frannie again gripped her beast's horns. The water rose almost to the saddle. It was warm and pleasant. The dhrane swam smoothly, swiftly, with neck stretched out, nose skimming the surface.

A dwindling silver lake. Ripples of silver-green phosphorescence; lines of silver fire diverging behind the swimming animals. . . .

Frannie turned to gaze at the receding island. An island already shrunken, dotted with shrinking colored lights. And ahead, the empty starlit lake.

IV

Riding over the land, it had been a breathless whistling of wind, a swift surging of the ground beneath Frannie's feet. Here in the lake it was quiet and calm; the warm lapping of the silver-streaked water; the quiet stars overhead. Frannie heard Rokk talking back over his shoulder to Leela, and then Leela drew in her mount and spoke to Frannie.

"He says the giants have all gone back through Reaf to their own world. One was wading out here toward Reaf. He was very large then; he is to stay in Reaf on guard, while we go on. He is there now—it is not far."

"How big are we, Leela? Did he say?" There was no way, here in the lake, by which size could be compared. The exaltation of the ride—its swift, tempestuous movement—the wild, romantic fantasy of it—all this was leaving Frannie. A depression was upon her. She added, "Oh, Leela, Brett did not see us! And Frank — will we ever see them again?"

Leela said, "We are about twice normal size—it will not be far to Reaf, swimming like this." In the starlight, Frannie could see that Leela was smiling; a wistful, heavy-hearted smile. She was trying to be brave. And Frannie smiled back.

"We mustn't get frightened, Leela. Just watch our chance—try to escape. You stay by me all you can. I mean —when we get"—there was a catch in her voice—"when we get—under the mountains beyond Reaf."

Leela nodded. Rokk was calling, and Leela urged her dhrane forward.

Soon the left-hand shore and the mountains ahead were visible. The water grew warmer. Small islands appeared. The dhranes panted with the heat of the water; in the muddy channels between the islands, sometimes they floundered. Steam was in the air; ahead it lay like a bank of fog, with the frowning mountains rising above it.

Presently, through the fog, the houses of Reaf came into view. Small ghostly outlines of houses on stilts. To the right of them was a yawning black mouth where one of the rivers plunged into the mountain. The turgid current was swinging that way; Rokk urged the dhrane across it, to the left.

Soon they were swimming among the houses. These seemed very small. Frannie reached up from the dhrane's back and laid her hand on the roof of one as she passed it. Rokk was heading inshore. The mountain here was a frowning cliff-face, with a very narrow ledge at the water level. The ledge ended in a wooden incline bridge leading upward to a group of buildings near shore. Six or eight small houses with doors and rectangles of windows, clustered there together, perched on stiff wooden legs over the water. The incline bridge connected them with the shore, and they were strung together by a broad wooden platform.

Rokk shouted, and from behind the buildings a giant appeared. He had been sitting in the water. He stood up, with mud and slime dripping from him. A man, like Rokk, but younger. His hair was sleek and black, and fell long to his bared chest, across which a skin was draped. His face was broad and flat, and hairless. He stood with the water to his knees, beside the buildings with his arm arched over their roofs as he leaned against them.

He smiled. He called, "*Ae*, Rokk!" And Rokk answered, "*Ae*, Degg."

They spoke together. Then they spoke in Leela's language. Leela murmured to Frannie, "This man Degg is to remain here until we are safely above."

Rokk issued his commands. Degg sat down again in the water, waist-deep, with his arms holding his hunched-up knees. He yawned and waved his hand as Rokk swam his dhrane away.

Again in single file, they swam. As they passed the buildings Frannie chanced to glance up. On the porch-like platform up there she caught a glimpse of a green-white shape—a thing stretched out somnolent—a thing, headless!

It was only a glimpse. Frannie's swimming dhrane carried her beyond sight of it. . . . She was shuddering.

The water now was unpleasantly hot. The current was strong. It was beginning to ripple the water. Ugly, white ripples . . . sinister.

The dhranes swam with the moving water. But they tossed their heads, uneasy. . . . Rokk was continually shouting, forcing his mount forward.

There were no houses here. The cliff-face was moving swiftly past. And then a black mouth swept into view. A hundred feet high and twice as broad. A mouth, with steam like the fetid breath of a monster. . . .

The water was sweeping that way. Surging in a torrent. White water, leaping over jagged rock-points that split it into foam. . . .

And from the mouth came a sullen roaring. . . .

Frannie's dhrane lifted its head with a sharp bleat of fear. Its body was swung sidewise by the tumbling water, but it recovered and swam desperately.

The roaring rose to a deafening torrent of sound. White water was leaping everywhere. Frannie half closed her eyes; she could see a whirling blob which was Leela ahead of her. Then the black mouth opened to encompass the world as Frannie was swept into it.

An inferno of roaring blackness. . . .

CHAPTER 5

CLIMBING INTO LARGENESS UNFATHOMABLE

In the fog and darkness at the foot of the incline, Martt stood tense, with upraised knife. The green-white thing was poised for its leap. It was not babbling now; its eye on the stalk glared balefully. A shudder swept Martt, as Frannie had shuddered an hour before when she and Leela passed this way, and she had caught a glimpse of this thing lying somnolent on the platform above.

Martt muttered, "Stay back, Zee." And then the headless thing leaped. Martt caught it on his outflung hand and knife, but did not stop it. He felt his hand sinking within it—a soft, sticky warmth. Its body came on, and struck his chest—a blow as though a soft, yielding pillow had struck him.

There was a moment, there in the darkness, of unutterable horror as Martt felt and saw his body mingled with the body of this gleaming thing clawing at him. He struck wildly, fighting, kicking in a panic of futility. Wet, warm and sticky! He seemed to tear its body apart. But the glowing, lurid outlines, wavering, came back always into shape.

The thing itself was in a panic. Lunging, twisting. Its claws scraped Martt's face, too imponderable to scratch. The slit of its mouth opened to grip his throat; its teeth sank impotently within his flesh. Pressing against him . . . the slime of it was warm, with a stench, noisome. . . .

Horrible! A nausea made Martt reel. And the thing now was crying with terrible, frightened cries. But they were low, suppressed.

Martt staggered. And suddenly the lurid green shape gathered itself and fled. Martt saw a quivering dark wound in its side. It fled whimpering along the rocks of the shore and disappeared.

Martt relaxed. He was unhurt. He stooped to the water and washed the stickiness from him. He felt a wild, hysterical desire to laugh.

"Zee, it—that thing was as frightened as I was!"

"Are you all right, Martt? It's gone! What was it?" She clutched at him anxiously.

"Yes—all right. It couldn't hurt me and I couldn't hurt it. Not much." He laughed again, but suddenly sobered. "Zee, there's a giant up there asleep. Hear him?"

They listened. From up there in the fog the deep, heavy breathing still sounded. Martt whispered, "You wait here, Zee. I'll creep up on him—get the drugs." He turned to her tensely. "Zee, you stay here.

Close against the rocks. Whatever happens, you stay here. I'll—if I get the drugs—I'll make myself very large. Kill him—then I'll come back to you. Don't move—whatever happens."

He left her. The wooden incline sloped sharply upward. The fog momentarily seemed clearing. Martt saw above him the outlines of the houses, a broad platform connecting them. And stretched the length of the platform was the huge, recumbent figure of a man. He seemed about forty feet tall. He lay hunched, cramped for space, with one arm upflung to the roof of a house, and one leg dangling nearly to the water.

Martt reached the platform. He crept past the giant's legs. The waist, wrapped in a skin, was rising and falling with the giant's breathing. Martt's own breath was held. His heart was thumping wildly. The giant stirred; Martt stepped nimbly aside to avoid the movement of the great body.

At the giant's waist he paused, reached up, fumbling. There seemed a belt here, with pockets. The drugs should be there. The bulge of the giant's middle was nearly as high as Martt's chest as he stood upright. He reached up, and over, feeling with careful fingers.

With a thrill of triumph, Martt found two cylinders, each as long as his forearm. In the starlight he opened them, drew from each a flat, square tablet of compressed powder. The drugs! But which was for growth and which for shrinkage? One was larger than the other. It suggested growth. It was flat and square—the length of Martt's thumb. Impulsively he would have crushed it in his mouth and swallowed it. But a thought gave him pause. This giant was nearly seven times larger than himself. This expanded dose of the drug then would be too great. Martt bit off a corner of the white tablet. Swallowed it. An acrid taste. . . . He replaced the remainder in the cylinder and put both cylinders in his pocket, tying his jacket close around them. Would they expand with his body? He could only hope so.

Expand? How did he know but that he had taken the wrong drug? Well, he could soon rectify that. . . . A panic swept Martt that the giant might awaken too soon. . . . The drug was taking effect; Martt was sick and dizzy. He reeled to a post at an outer corner of the platform. Clung there. He all but slipped and fell into the water ten feet below.

A moment, then the sickness passed. He was growing! He could feel the post shrinking within his grip. The outlines of the houses were contracting. The knife in his hand, already tiny, slipped and fell into the water with a splash.

The post soon was too small for Martt to hold. He reached over and steadied himself upon the grass roof of the nearest house. It was melting under his hands. The sleeping giant lay at his feet, a giant no longer; a man, like himself—the two of them crowding a tiny, flimsy platform with toy houses beside it, and black water flowing sluggishly close underneath.

A sense of power swept Martt. A triumph. He was not afraid of this man, unarmed like himself. Already the man was undersized. . . . Why, Martt could grip him, choke him! . . . These toy houses—a sweep of Martt's arm would have scattered them.

Martt was bending awkwardly over the roof-tops. A ripping, tearing noise sounded. The platform, the houses, quivered, wavered, collapsed! The whole structure, bending beneath the weight of the two huge bodies, gave way. Martt found himself floundering in warm, muddy water, entangled in a debris of splintered wood and grasslike house-roofs.

And with him, his antagonist, awakened to a startled confusion, floundering, struggling to get upon his feet.

Martt rose to his knees. The shallow lake bottom was sticky with mud. A house-roof hung upon his shoulder. He heaved it off; stood upright, dripping, breathless. The other man was up also. In the starlight, amid the floating wreckage, they faced each other. Martt was the taller; and he was still growing. He saw his enemy shrinking before him. A slim young fellow, with long black hair. A broad, flat face, with a startled surprize on it.

Martt laughed. And shouted, "I've got you now!" He would have leaped. But abruptly he recalled Zee, tiny in size, huddled there by the shore. A lunge of his body—or of this other man's body—a flip of one of these torn housebeams—and Zee would be killed. . . .

Martt turned and waded rapidly away. He wondered if the other man would follow him. Martt wanted to get him farther out into the lake. It was an error; for as Martt turned to look back, he saw his antagonist's hand go to his belt; and then to his mouth. More of the drug! Martt thought that he had in his own pocket all there was of it here. But the giant had more. Already he was growing. As Martt stood undecided, he saw the giant growing like himself. He was smaller than Martt now, but growing more swiftly. He stood for an instant with his arms upflung toward the stars; then he came wading forward.

The mountains were at Martt's right hand. Shrinking, swiftly contracting. The water now came not much over his ankles; a small patch of wreckage marked where the collapsed buildings had stood.

Martt retreated slightly; he turned, moved to the cliff-face with his back against it.

Then, with a swirl of water, his enemy rushed at him. Martt met the rush unyielding. They locked. Swaying, struggling each to throw the other. The lake at their ankles was lashed white. They fought silently, grimly. The fellow was strong; he pushed Martt backward against the mountain. His hands strove for Martt's throat. But Martt ripped them away. With a body-hold he bent his adversary backward; but always he could feel the man's body swelling within his grasp.

A desperation seized Martt. If he could not win now, at once, he would lose. This fellow was growing too large. Beside them, as they swayed, Martt caught a glimpse of the mountain. It was now a cliff not much higher than his head. At his feet Martt was dimly aware of a small black hole in the cliff into which water was rushing.

One of Martt's legs was wrapped around the legs of his adversary; and suddenly the man tipped. They went down together, Martt on top. It was like falling into a puddle of water. They lunged, rolled over. And then the giant rose, with Martt clinging to him. He was much larger than Martt now; he heaved himself upward, flung Martt against the cliff. Martt's head and shoulders went over its top. Jagged spires of rock; loose rocks lying there. The giant jerked Martt back; he fell on his feet; saw his antagonist towering over him.

But in Martt's hand now was a jagged lump of rock which he had snatched from the cliff. He flung it, and it caught the giant full on the forehead. He staggered, and as his grip on Martt loosened, Martt leaped away.

And the giant came crashing down, his huge body falling before the hole in the mountain; blocking it so

that the surging lake backed up with a deepening torrent of the hot, black water.

II

MARTT stood panting in the starlight. He had won. The scene around him was still dwindling, but in a moment it stopped. Cliffs to his shoulder. A shrunken, shallow lake. Its tiny flat islands were no bigger than his foot. Along its shore where the cliff ended he could see the open country. Tiny threads of roads. An island with points of colored light—the island of the festival. At his feet, miniature houses on stilts, many of them strewn on the water, trampled by this combat of giants in which he had been victorious.

And the fallen giant there in the water, blocking the river mouth, the water deepening against his side.

Martt took a cautious step. Zee was down there somewhere. Then he saw her figure, dimly, in the mist which hung over the lake at his ankles. She seemed about the size of his finger. She was standing at the water's edge, waving up to him.

He bent down—carefully. He said softly, "I see you, Zee. You must get larger. I'll give you some of the drug to take."

She shouted, "Yes." It was a very tiny voice, echoing from far away.

Martt's jacket had been partly torn from him. One of his shoulders was bare, bleeding from where he had been thrown against the cliff-top. He stooped and dashed water upon the wound; and saw Zee crouch and shield herself from the deluge of water he splashed.

He thought, "Careful, Martt;" and from his pocket drew one of the cylinders. The tablets of the drug still were the size of his thumb. He took one, laid it carefully at the water's edge, near Zee. It was nearly the size of her body. She walked to it, examined it.

"Break it," he said. "Eat some—about the size of your thumb."

He could hardly have seen a speck of it so small. Zee found a loose rock. She pounded at the white tablet. Ate a fragment. And presently Martt gave her some of the other drug to stop her growth; and she was his own size, standing beside him, gazing at the shrunken scene in wonderment.

III

THEY stood consulting over what they should do. They had the precious drugs. Should they return with them to Brett, or go on and rescue Frannie and Leela? Martt was confident. With the drugs in his pocket, all sense of fear was passed. It was obvious that the world here was in no danger. This fallen giant at their feet was the last. But Frannie and Leela were captured; were taken up to that other realm. To delay following would be most dangerous of all.

And Zee agreed. Her eyes were sparkling. She stretched out her white arms. She said, "With this power we would be cowards to turn back——"

The giant still had some of the drugs about his person. Martt bent over him.

"Zee! He isn't dead!"

The young giant's face was white; blood was on his forehead where the rock had struck. He opened his eyes; rolled over in the water. The dammed river surged again into its black hole.

"Zee, look! He isn't dead!"

He sat up; smiled in a daze, struggled to rise to his feet but could not.

The rock which Martt had hurled lay like a great boulder in the lake. Martt seized it, but Zee caught his wrist.

"Martt! Don't——"

A sense of shame struck at Martt; he dropped the rock. "Zee, can you talk to him—try if he understands your language."

She spoke, and the young giant answered. He was trying to smile, grateful for the words. Zee stooped and splashed water on his wounded forehead.

"Martt, he says his name is Degg—he has seen Leela and Frannie—a man and woman took them into the river mouth."

The fellow did not seem greatly hurt. He was frightened, watchful, but docile enough. Martt took the drugs from him. "Ask him the way up to his world—it will help us——"

It was the one thing that would help them! Martt realized it.

Degg, outwardly at least, seemed friendly enough. When Zee promised that they would not hurt him—would take him to his own world, the only way he would ever get there, since he had no drugs—he agreed readily to lead them.

"But we must be careful," said Martt. "Never let him get larger than ourselves. And watch him, always."

At Degg's direction, first they diminished their stature until, compared to the buildings of Reaf, they were about fifty feet tall. Degg said, in Zee's language, "We wade now into the black river. Rokk likes to swim—but wading is easier."

They were ready to start. Soon they would be beyond this world—up into largeness unfathomable. Martt said, "We must leave some message for Brett. Let him know what became of us."

There was no way to leave a written message. Conspicuously on a rock near the shore, Martt left the broad belt of his jacket. As he turned away, Degg was calling softly, "*Ae!* Eeff! Eeff, come here!" The green-white, headless thing was lurking among the rocks. "Eeff, come here!"

It advanced, whimpering. Compared to Martt's fifty-foot stature it seemed now no bigger than a rat. Martt conquered his aversion and stood waiting while it approached. In the starlight it glowed unreal; its eye on the stalk pointed distrustfully at Martt. It stood at Degg's feet; whimpering—and mumbling words.

Degg said to Zee, "It is afraid of your man. I tell it you will do no harm. It wants to come with us." He stooped over. "Eeff, you come with us?"

It understood, partly the words spoken in Zee's language, and partly the gesture. It said mouthingly, "Yes. Eeff come—with you."

Uncanny! Horrible! Martt shuddered. Degg was saying, "It is a very good friend to me. May we take it?"

"All right," said Martt shortly, when Zee translated. But it worried him. He resolved more than ever to watch Degg carefully, and to watch this headless thing Degg called a friend.

They fed a small morsel of the drug to Eeff, until it had grown to a size normal to them. Then they started. The black mouth of the river, to them in this size, seemed a passageway ten or twelve feet high and twice as broad. The river swirled about their legs; hot, with steam rising. Soon they were in darkness, following the river around a bend. But only for a moment. Martt and Zee were hand in hand. Degg was in advance; Martt could just distinguish Degg's figure with the shining blob of Eeff in the water beside him.

Darkness. But Martt's eyes were growing accustomed to it. And now the rocks of the caverns seemed to be giving light—a dim phosphorescence. The cavern expanded. They waded across a broad, shallow lake where the

water was calm. Then again into a tunnel. Miles down its tortuous course with the river swirling and tumbling about them.

Sometimes there was a dry ledge upon which they could walk. Sometimes the river deepened, and they had to swim. Always Degg advanced grimly, steadily, and silently. A foreboding grew upon Martt. Were they going right? Was this the way Frannie and Leela had gone? Once he whispered, "Do you think, Zee, that he's tricking us?"

She shook her head. "You have all the drugs. He would not dare."

They had waded for hours. Then ahead of them they saw Degg pause. The river here plunged straight down into a black abyss. To the left a passageway turned upward. It was some ten feet high and two or three times as wide. It went up at an incline into the green, luminous darkness. They followed Degg. A mile perhaps, steadily climbing. Martt calculated. They had already walked possibly fifteen miles—and they were more than eight times the normal size of Zee's world. That was more than a hundred and twenty miles underground—most of it downward.

Martt realized that he was tired. And hungry. Before leaving Reaf he had thought of food necessary for this trip. Degg had a concentrated food—a dull brown powder. Martt promptly had appropriated it—had tested it to make sure it was not a size-drug. . . .

The passageway abruptly opened into black, empty space. A rocky slope rolling gently upward, strewn with huge black boulders. It extended as far as Martt could see, upward into a luminous darkness. Overhead was a black sky—murky with distance.

Degg stopped. "We begin getting large here."

Zee translated it to Martt.

"Let's eat, then," said Martt. "Zee, aren't you tired and hungry?"

There was water lying in flat pools on the rocks. It was clear, cold and sweet. They sat down, talking and eating. Then Zee slept. And Degg slept also.

Martt sat alert, watching, while the headless thing stretched itself somnolent on a rock near by, its single eye on the stalk wilting downward in drowsiness.

Martt strove to master his revulsion. He called softly, "Eeff! Eeff, come here!"

But it would not come. It moved farther away, whimpering to itself.

IV

"ZEE, wake up! We've got to get started. You've slept hours."

The real size-change now began. In single file they walked up the black slope. It shrank beneath them—creeping, crawling, dwindling away under their feet. The boulders shrank into rocks, into pebbles. In an hour they were walking upon a smooth surface.

The black void was no longer empty. Mountains showed ahead—and to the sides. Giant faces of rock, looming into unfathomable distance of the black sky. The mountains were drawing closer; contracting, rushing down with a violent movement.

Martt apprehensively glanced behind. A wall of dwindling rock was coming after them. The drug in these larger doses seemed acting with a multiplied power. The scene was a dizzy swirl of movement. Mountains closing in everywhere. To Martt came a flash of terror. They would be crushed. Their bodies were growing tremendously to fill this constricted space. . . .

Degg had stopped walking. They were gathered in a group. They were now in the center of a circular valley, with a ring of mountains closing in.

A ten-mile valley . . . a mile . . . a hundred feet. . . .

But the mountains shrank to hills; to a low cliff-wall—a ridge. . . . It closed in. . . .

"Now!" shouted Degg. They leaped over the low ledge of encircling rock; scrambled over it and fell on a level ground above. . . .

Beside them Martt saw a small jagged hole in the ground. . . . The size of his waist . . . his fist . . . his finger. . . . It dwindled, closed and was gone; while again, above them and all about, were black, empty spaces, filled soon with shrinking canyons out of which hastily they climbed. . . .

A fantasmagoria of climbing, struggling upward to avoid being crushed by their own growth. . . .

There was a canyon too narrow, with sides too high. . . . They had to stop their growth, and climb its jagged, precipitous side. The climb took hours. There was another meal, while Martt slept and Zee remained on guard.

Then another valley. Broad, with a steeply inclined floor. They grew out of it; into another; and another. . . .

Martt became conscious of a change in the air. Cooler, with a dankness. And now at last, overhead the void was no longer black. A suggestion of purple. And suddenly as they leaped from a chasm which shrank and closed under them, Martt saw a sky. Somber purple, with stars.

A new conception of it all swept Martt. His Earth—the stars of its Universe. The Inner Surface of the Atom, Zee's realm—millions of times larger. And now—compared to Reaf . . . was he now a million times the size of Reaf? . . . Or a million million? Largeness, unfathomable. A convex world out here. The surface of a globe, whirling in Space. And overhead, still other stars, so gigantic—so remote!

V

MARTT gazed curiously around. They were at last in Degg's world—the region of the Arcs. A tumbled land of crags upon which lay a gray-black snow. Martt's heart sank before its utter desolation—a tumbled waste, upheaved as though by some cataclysm of nature. Desolation! And as though to veil it, a fall of blackish snow—a somber, tragic shroud.

It was night. And, Martt surmised, a winter season. Yet the air was not cold; merely dank. And the snow seemed not cold, congealed perhaps by the dank, heavy air; but to Martt's touch, not cold, no more than chill.

With her bare limbs and filmy veiling, Zee was shivering. Martt discarded his jacket, but she did not want it.

He said, "But you must be cold, Zee."

"I'm not." She shook herself. "I'm—frightened. This—night up here—it's like a tomb, Martt."

Tomblike, indeed. A dank, chill silence brooded over the night. And then, almost unheralded, it was not night, but day. A small, cold-red sun leaped up from the distant black horizon. A day of dull, flat light. It stained the snow with blood. . . .

Blood everywhere. . . .

Degg said somberly to Zee, "Always blood. It is an omen. . . . My land, doomed——" There was a quiver in Zee's voice as she repeated his words to Martt.

They had come now not to mistrust Degg. He seemed a well-meaning youth. Simple-minded. He had told them something of his world—of Rokk, and the woman Mobah. Degg, in his heart, hated and feared Rokk.

"Why?" demanded Zee.

He turned his dark, solemn eyes upon her. "You are too gentle, little girl Zee, to understand. We have

many—horrible things here in Arc. I would not talk of them with you."

It had been Rokk's plan, Degg said, to take Leela and Frannie to the place where he lived. Degg was to join Rokk there. . . . It was not so very far. . . . Degg called it Rokk's mound. They were headed that way now. Soon it would be night again—Martt could do what he thought was best toward rescuing the two girl prisoners. And Martt promised he would protect Degg.

Vaguely in Martt's mind had been the idea that he could use the drugs again now—make himself still larger—catch Rokk unawares. But the large drug would take no further effect. The maximum size had been reached. Degg did not know why; save that these drugs were for smallness—the large one merely an antidote to the other.

Martt was left without tangible plan. But his first desire was to get near Rokk's mound—whatever sort of place that might be. And he would decide then what could be done.

The blood-red sun came swiftly up in a low arc, and plunged as swiftly down again. To Martt, it had been some half an hour of daylight. Now came the brooding night—and in another half-hour the sun would again make its low sweep.

Martt urged Degg forward. Eeff was leading — lurid, green-white against the black of the ground. Then it stopped. Its eye quivered; it screamed—a long, shuddering, half-human cry of fright.

Degg stood frozen—a statue in the gloom. And then Martt—and Zee also, for she uttered a low, suppressed cry—saw what had frightened Eeff.

It was about a hundred feet away—a dull, glowing red as though the blood of sunlight were upon it. A thing which might have been a long, blood-red vine. Not animal, but vegetable. It lay on the ground—a great, thick stem, with upflung leafy branches waving like tentacles. At intervals, upon long stalks, were round spots of green light. Gleaming, baleful eyes.

The thing was lying its length upon the ground. Not quiescent, but everywhere in quivering, undulating, snakelike movement. Its eyes seemed all turned this one way. Eyes suggesting an intelligence—a reasoning behind them. A thing, not animal but vegetable! Its brain, lacking even the least vestige of human or animal restraint, cast in a mold unutterably horrible.

Eeff was crouching at Degg's feet, babbling with terror. Degg muttered, "It is unrooted! Free! It—I told Rokk they would break free some time—before he was ready!"

"Unrooted!" Zee echoed.

Unrooted! It was slithering, out there in the darkness. . . . It shrank to a blood-red blur. . . . It vanished. . . .

They went on again. Degg would not talk, save to reiterate fearsomely, "I knew they would cast off their roots! Roaming, everywhere. And Rokk thought he dared to grow them——"

A rise of ground lay ahead. Beyond its crest only the purple sky was visible, with stars sweeping in rapid, low arcs. Martt, Degg and Zee were walking together, with Eeff close before them.

Eeff began whimpering again; then screamed. And ahead, from over the crest of the hill, as though in answer came an echoing scream! Yet not an echo! A scream, human! It drove the blood to Martt's heart; stopped his breathing. The scream of a voice familiar—a girl's voice—Frannie!

For all the horror surging over him, Martt leaped forward. And stopped, stricken on the hill-crest.

Beneath him in the gloom lay a

shallow, bowl-like depression. The starlight illumined it wanly. Frannie was down there, struggling in the grip of a blood-red, vegetable thing! A segment of it was wrapped around her, dragging her forward. The light of it drenched her with blood; its myriad green eyes glared throughout its waving length.

And ahead of it was a line of others of its kind, leading the way, slithering up and over the opposite slope!

The horrors of the Blood-red Day, the City of Ice, and the diabolical designs of Rokk will be told in the thrilling chapters that bring this story to an end in next month's WEIRD TALES

The Three Witches

By ERNEST DOWSON

(Reprint)

All the moon-shed nights are over,
  And the days of gray and dun;
There is neither may nor clover,
  And the day and night are one.

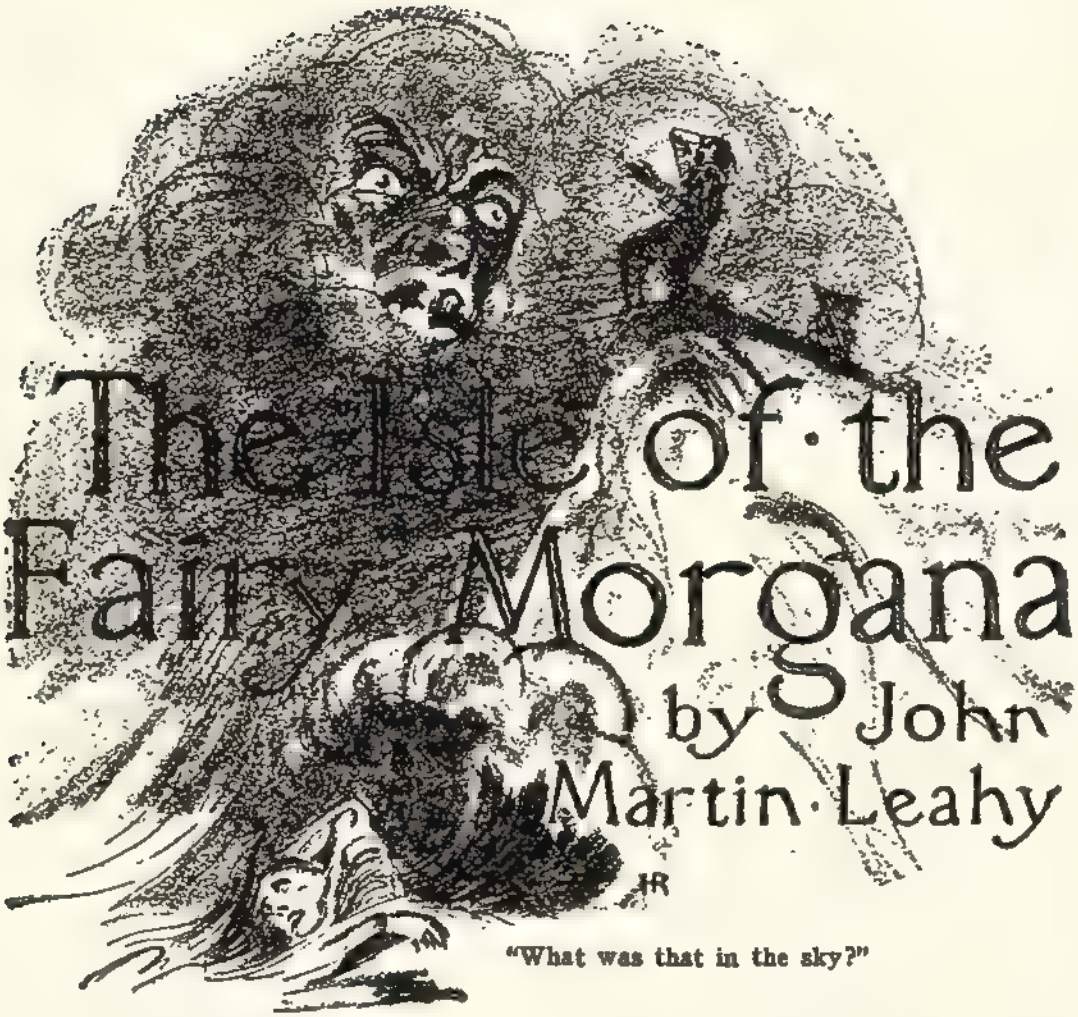
Not an hamlet, not a city
  Meets our strained and tearless eyes;
In the plain without a pity,
  Where the wan grass droops and dies.

We shall wander through the meaning
  Of a day and see no light,
For our lichened arms are leaning
  On the ends of endless night.

We, the children of Astarte,
  Dear abortions of the moon,
In a gay and silent party,
  We are riding to you soon.

Burning ramparts, ever burning!
  To the flame which never dies
We are yearning, yearning, yearning,
  With our gay and tearless eyes.

In the plain without a pity,
  (Not an hamlet, not a city)
  Where the wan grass droops and dies.



"What was that in the sky?"

What fairies haunt this ground?
—Shakespeare: *Cymbeline.*

1. *The Meeting*

DESOLATE and lone it rises there in the midst of one of the loneliest reaches in all the lonely Sea of Bering. Flang Island it is called, this mass of rock, black, rent, smashed and jagged—the summit, perhaps, of a mountain range sunk beneath the waters in some lost age of the earth. It is barely a half-mile in length, its greatest width is but half of that, the highest point only about two hundred feet above the sea.

Flang Island (soon to be a place of tragedy, the scene of what is perhaps the strangest dénouement to murder on record) lies very near the fifty-fifth parallel of north latitude. The time was the beginning of July; to be precise, the date was the 2nd. At this season (unless the sky be overcast) darkness never settles upon that black and desolate place—the abode of a few seals and fewer sea-birds. The sun, his declination 23° north, does not set till near 9 o'clock; at midnight he is only twelve degrees below the (northern) horizon, so that there is no darkness but twilight only; and at half-past 3 he once more has emerged from out the wastes of ocean. How great the contrast at the opposite season! For, at the winter solstice, the sun does not rise till

8.30, to attain at midday an altitude of only a dozen degrees, and at half-past 3 he disappears. A strange place, forsooth, for any fairy to choose for a place of habitation—this dark and savage, this storm-beaten isle in the midst of the dark and tempestuous subarctic sea. A fairy's, though, it was, this Island of Flang. That, however, the lone watcher there on the summit was doomed never to know. But Cuthbert Griswold was to know it, know it soon and to his sorrow—that this was the Isle of the Fairy Morgana.

The little *Gorgon,* a twenty-five-foot sloop, was actually passing Flang when Griswold saw him. The sloop was sailing on a northeast course before a very gentle breeze from the south. At the time Cuthbert Griswold (the only soul on board, except a half-grown wolf-dog) made the discovery, the eastern extremity of the island was on his port beam, distant perhaps a little less than a half-mile. This part of the island rises sheer to a height of fifty feet or so, and there, on the very edge of that rock wall, was the figure of a man, clear-cut against the blue of the sky and signaling frantically. Even as Griswold saw him, the voice of the castaway came across the water, the sound faint as that soft wash of the sea against the sides of the *Gorgon.* On the instant the wolf-dog raised himself up from his warm bed and thrust his savage visage above the cockpit coaming, his look fixed upon Flang.

"A man, Pluto," said Griswold. "See him there? But what on earth is a man doing in this accursed place? Well, I have been on that island myself a couple of times, and perhaps people, had any seen me there, would have wondered the same thing. And look at that, Pluto: he is signaling to us like a man gone mad. If he's a castaway, little wonder, for a dozen years might pass, and never a sail lift above the horizon of this bit of ocean. We'll run down into the bay and see what it means."

Griswold put his helm over, and the little vessel glided off in a direction at right angles to the course on which she had been standing, slowly drawing in, as she advanced, toward the rocks, along which the surf broke with a sound like the low growl, so Griswold thought, of some savage beast.

A little space—the *Gorgon* was then about midway the isle—the sails were lowered and the gasoline engine was started. Slowly the little craft moved in toward the broken wall, passed in behind three rocks which thrust up out of the sea like monstrous black tusks and was heading into a passage, two hundred feet or so in width, that some convulsion of nature had riven into the island.

For a little distance the great fissure (which comes very near making of Flang two islets) ran slantingly. Then came a sharp turn to port, a gentle one to starboard, and the *Gorgon* was gliding out into a little oval-shaped basin, rock-walled and as placid as a mill-pond. On the left the rocks rose up sheer from the water's edge and to a height of one hundred feet. The other side was broken and smashed; in one place there was a bit of beach. Off went the engine, and, when he was abreast of this spot, Griswold let his anchor go in three fathoms water, it being low tide at the time.

"Hello!" he sang out to the figure, haggard and wobegone, that had just appeared on the ribbon of beach. "How the devil did you get here?"

"*Mother Goose,*" was the answer.

Griswold stared.

"Mother Goose? Do you mean that the old girl brought you here on her broomstick?"

A wan smile flitted across the face of the castaway.

"Trading schooner," he explained.

"She was smashed on those rocks at the western end of the island. Every soul was lost but me."

"When was that?" Griswold asked.

"In that storm—on the 27th. The captain thought that he was well to the eastward of this island. The schooner caved in like an empty barrel smashed against a stone. Never saw so much as a single plank afterward. Don't know how it happened, but I found myself flung up into a cleft in the wall, and somehow I managed to crawl to a place of safety."

"But found," said Griswold, "that you hadn't landed in Eden."

"In hell," returned the castaway. "I knew that years might pass and no ship ever sight this cursed island —or sight me on it. But I knew that I could not live for years—perhaps not even for months. I'm nearly starved. Tried to get a seal but couldn't make it."

"Well," Griswold told him, "there is no dearth of *muckymuck* in the *Gorgon's* lazaret, and you can make up for lost time."

Griswold, as he spoke, was launching his little dingey—dinkey, he called it.

"I thought," the castaway said, "that you would never see me."

"Lucky thing for you that I did! And 'tis horrible to think that I might have passed by and left you here to your fate. But—well, you're safe now. No use worrying about what might have been, you know."

Safe? Little did either man dream of that revelation which a few short minutes were to bring. In that moment in which Griswold had sighted him there on the rock wall, signaling so frantically—in that very moment the castaway (though neither man dreamed it) had received the doom of death.

For this man, as Cuthbert Griswold was soon to learn, was Ferdinand Chantrell.

2. *"You!"*

"ALL alone?" queried the castaway as Griswold stepped into the little skiff.

"All alone, save for Pluto there. On my way from Antatu to Tamahnowis."

"I should think that you'd want a bigger boat and a crew of one at least."

Griswold laughed.

"Some folks," said he, "think that I'm crazy to be Christopher-Columbusing about in a craft like the *Gorgon;* but I've been half-way around the world in that little tub. Maybe some day I'll circumnavigate the globe in it—just to show them that I'm not dippy."

Griswold was now moving toward the beach. The sloop was only fifty or sixty feet out.

"You seemed," said the other, "to know this place."

"Oh, yes. I have been here before, more than once. Queer place, this."

The next moment the bow rumbled up the strand and the little craft became stationary. Cuthbert Griswold arose and thrust forth a hand.

"Welcome, stranger," said he. "The little *Gorgon* isn't just what you'd call a palatial yacht, but I fancy that you'll find her better than these naked rocks of Flang. You are welcome to the best that she has to offer."

"You have saved my life!" exclaimed the other, wringing Griswold's hand—which was soon to send a bullet crashing into the speaker's heart. "And I am not a man that forgets. My name is Chantrell—Ferdinand Chantrell."

Griswold gave a low cry and dropped the other's hand as though it had been a deadly serpent.

"You!"

"What—what——?" faltered the castaway, recoiling from that fearful visage which was thrust toward him.

"You!" Griswold cried. "At last you!"

"What—what are you talking about?"

"So you don't know *me?*"

"I don't. I never saw you before."

"I know that. But you ought to know who I am."

"*Who* are you?"

Griswold laughed—the sound sardonic, horrible. Pluto, the wolf-dog, out there on the *Gorgon*, was watching; but (as regards things like this meeting and what followed) wolf-dogs, like dead men, can tell no tales. But (what Griswold never dreamed) fairies can. And this was the Isle of the Fairy Morgana.

"Who am I?" Griswold said. "Can't you guess?"

"No."

"Well, well! He can't guess. Handsome Ferdy Chantrell, that devil with the ladies—so he can't guess who I am! Well, well! But why should I be surprized at that? For, of course, I am not the only one who has a score to settle with Handsome Ferdy, and he's wondering which one it can be. Of course! I might have known that. *She* wasn't the only one."

"She?" exclaimed Ferdinand Chantrell. "Whom do you mean?"

"See there, you hovering angels!" cried Griswold. "He admits it. He doesn't know whom I mean. If there had been only one, he wouldn't be puzzled the least; he would know who I am."

"Can't you tell me?"

"Yes!" half screamed Griswold. "I can tell you, all right! Her name was Amanda!"

Chantrell recoiled a step, and his haggard face went pale as ashes.

"You—you!"

"Yes! It is I—I! It is Cuthbert Griswold!"

"I thought that you were dead."

Griswold laughed.

"So that's your explanation? And, I suppose, that isn't the only thing that you thought. But you see that I am not dead, that I am very much alive. And at last I've got you—got you right where I want you. There is no one here to see, and Flang will hold its secret well. Why, it couldn't have been better if I had had the ordering of it all myself. It is almost too good to be true!"

Chantrell's look became hard, defiant.

"What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? That I am going to kill you," Griswold told him, "kill you and feed you to the fishes. Before I am done with you, Handsome Ferdy, you will wish that you had gone down with that schooner—wish to God that you had never been born."

"So you are going to murder me?"

"Call it what you like. No!" Griswold cried, whipping out a revolver. "Don't edge an inch nearer, or I'll drill you through this very instant. I intend to let you live a while, but that, of course, is contingent upon your good behavior."

"I am indeed grateful," said Chantrell, bowing with mock gravity.

Cuthbert Griswold stared, and then he laughed.

"You don't know what you are grateful for!"

"You!" exclaimed the other. "You! Millions of men—this island in the sea—and it had to be *you* that came!"

"Well, Handsome Ferdy, they say that truth is stranger than any fiction, you know. And who can guess what Nemesis may do? Handsome Ferdy! Well, well, and at last he stands before me. You know, I often wondered what you were like. What did Amanda see so wonderful in you, anyway? Well, well."

And he eyed Chantrell down and up and from this side and from that

as though the man belonged to some strange species.

"Handsome Ferdy! How do you lady-killers do it, anyway? I can't say that I am a bit the wiser now that you stand here before me, even though I see that the name was not wholly unmerited. Oh, I can see that Handsome Ferdy is one of those guys that women go crazy over. But why do they do it? And I thought that my Amanda was far, far above any such weakness as that. Why did she fall for you? Well, well! She might have done the decent thing, though: she, the both of you, might have waited until she had divorced poor me. But no, while I was gone, slaving away for her, you had to steal her."

"Steal her!"

Chantrell laughed—a laugh that cut Griswold to the very heart.

"Steal her? No man has to *steal* a woman from the likes of you! As for a divorce, you know that she was afraid—afraid that you would murder her, as you threatened her more than once that you would. If ever fear, stark fear, had a woman's heart in its grip, it had Amanda's. No use trying any camouflage with me, Griswold. I know."

"I suppose so. What a lot you know! But Fate has given you into my hands to wreak my vengeance upon you. *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.* You have had your hour of triumph. Now I shall have mine."

"So be it, then."

"You'll sing a very different tune before I am done with you, Handsome Ferdy. You'll curse the very hour that you were born into this world."

Ferdinand Chantrell laughed.

"You poor fool! Curse the hour I was born when I have known the heaven of a noble woman's love?"

"Bosh!" cut in Griswold, gnashing his teeth.

"Of course it is bosh to a warped, niggard soul such as yours. Love! You don't know what love is. You never can know."

"I should have had you to lesson me! But you are mine, mine at last, and you'll rue the day that you set eyes on Amanda!"

"Never!" cried Chantrell, his dark eyes flashing with a light that, to Griswold, for an instant, seemed to belong to some world more wonderful and mysterious than this. "She was mine—mine, *mine!* though I had her for one short year only. Rue the day? Nothing that you can do could make me do that. Rue the day that I saw Amanda? If I had a thousand thousand lives, and you a thousand thousand fiends to torture each one in a thousand thousand ways for a hundred thousand thousand years—if that were so, yet I would glory in my love for Amanda!"

"Gosh!" said Griswold. "They ought to have called you Ferdy the Hyperbolical."

For some moments, in silence, he gazed at Ferdinand Chantrell, then he said:

"But, poetics aside, was she, *is* she so very dear to you, though now she is——?"

"An angel," Chantrell exclaimed, "in heaven!"

"A skull and some bones," Griswold said, "unless, that is, she is a few ashes in an urn."

CHANTRELL stood silent. A strange change was coming over the face and mien of Griswold. He thrust the weapon into his pocket and smiled at the other in a mysterious manner.

"So you thought that I meant it?" he laughed. "Well, well!"

"What are you talking about?"

"That bit of play-acting of mine," Cuthbert Griswold told him. "So you thought that I meant it, Ferdy? Just a little joke, and——"

"Joke!"

"A bit of melodramatics, Ferdy," smiled Griswold. "So you thought that I was going to kill you? Forget all that. Amanda—a skull and a few bones now or a handful of ashes—is nothing to me, the memory of her even less than that. The world is full of fools, but there is not a bigger fool in it than the man or woman who would keep husband or wife when the heart of that husband or wife belongs to another. Of course, if you love the one who is going—as I loved Amanda—the loss is a bitter one. But it is in such moments that a man proves himself either a philosopher or a fool. If a fool, he is going to kill the lover or kill them both. If a philosopher, he says, 'Since she no longer cares for me and wants another, let her go,' and he consoles himself with the thought that she isn't the only fish in this puddle that men call life.

"As for the threats that you mentioned—well, I admit them, though they were largely melodramatics, Ferdy, as witness to the fact that, when the test came, I proved myself a philosopher. For do not think that I didn't follow you because I couldn't find you. I repeat, I was a philosopher. It was a bitter hour, but I said, 'Let her go, and may she find with him the happiness that she failed to find with me.' Yes, Ferdy, it was a cruel stroke; but that is what I said. And I would say it again."

"I am glad," said Chantrell after some hesitation, "that you look at it in so sensible a manner."

"The only thing, Ferdy, I wish that she had done the sensible, the decent thing—that she had waited and got a divorce. But I, with my cursed melodramatics—always was that way, Ferdy—am to blame for that, I suppose, and I hope that she'll forgive me for it. Well, it is done, and it can not be mended. Peace to her soul."

Ferdinand Chantrell made no response. He was regarding the other in a searching, wondering manner. What was he to make of this strange business? Had Griswold's fearful threat, after all, been nothing but melodramatics? Or was this some fiendish cunning of a man fiendish and half mad?

"But come," said Griswold, turning. "Step into the tub, and we'll go out to the *Gorgon,* and I'll get you something to eat. Deuce of a way to treat a man who is half famished—telling him that you are going to murder him and feed him to the fishes! But sometimes, you know, Ferdy, a fellow must have his little joke."

"Joke! If all your jokes are of that grisly species, I hope that you'll never spring another on me."

"Ha, ha!" said Griswold, shoving off. "I fooled you that time. Admit it, Ferdy: you thought that I really meant it—meant to kill you."

"You certainly had a bloodthirsty, horrible look in your eye."

"Ha, ha!" barked Griswold.

"But why," Chantrell asked, "did you do it?"

"Just my idea of a little joke, Ferdy. Just a bit of melodramatics, as I said. Always was a weakness of mine. It has got me into a scrape more than once, but I could never resist it when the chance offered. I have been told a good many times that I missed my true vocation when I did not become an actor."

"If," said his victim, "all your acting could have been as real as that of a few minutes ago, you certainly did."

"I suppose so, Ferdy. But here's the *Gorgon,* and I'll have you a feed in a jiffy."

Joke? Griswold grinned and chuckled to himself. A joke? It was a joke indeed. An actor? If that infernal fool only knew the truth! But he didn't. *That* was what made it a joke. Ferdy thought that he was going to live; that his, Griswold's, fearful threat had been nothing but melo-

dramatics; thought that he, Griswold, was—a philosopher! Yes, Ferdy thought that he was going to be taken back to the world of men (and women) in the *Gorgon!* Ha, ha! That was delectable. Ferdy had visions of safety—undoubtedly of other Amandas. That would add to the bitterness of the cup when he drained it—perhaps in an hour, probably in two hours. Griswold didn't know yet; all he knew was that he was going to kill Handsome Ferdy, kill him here on this desolate and forbidding Island of Flang.

And how beautifully everything had befallen! No one would ever know what had happened to the schooner. No one would ever know that Ferdy Chantrell had even set foot on the island. And no living soul would ever know that he himself, Cuthbert Griswold, had met Chantrell there and killed him. Not a soul was there to see, not a sign would remain, and the Island of Flang could never tell.

"A joke!" thought the schemer. "Ha, ha! He is yet to learn what a grim joke it really is!"

Never once, however, did the thought flicker athwart the dark brain of Cuthbert Griswold that he himself might learn that, too.

3. The Murder

They stood upon the very summit of the isle—Griswold, Chantrell and the wolf-dog, Pluto.

"Queer place, this Flang," said Griswold.

"Yes," thought the other, "but no more queer than you are yourself. Now, why did we come up to this summit? Maybe my imagination is playing me tricks; but I'll be mighty glad when I am once more back in the world of men."

A covert watch upon Cuthbert Griswold as he stood there would have enhanced those vague and sinister misgivings that the victim tried, but in vain, to banish. This visit to the summit of Flang had been no mere whim on Griswold's part. He had come with a definite object in view. This would be one murder that would never out. Though alone with his victim on an uninhabited isle in the midst of a deserted sea, he would take no chances, would make sure that the sea *was* deserted. One could never tell. Ships had a strange way of suddenly appearing in the most unlikely places and at the most unlikely times.

Slowly, covertly his eye made the circuit of the distant horizon. Not a spot visible anywhere. The sea was deserted indeed. And he was alone with his victim, alone with Handsome Ferdy—who soon would be a thing the very antithesis of handsome, a thing from which an Amanda would recoil in horror. Alone, alone! Ha, ha, he had now made sure that the secret could never out. Why did he wait? The wolf-dog, the dark rocks—they could never tell.

"But not here," said Griswold. "I am going to fling him into the sea, feed him to the fishes. Why should I drag him over there when he can walk to the spot himself?"

"I wonder," Chantrell said, "how far it is out to that skyline."

"About sixteen nautical miles," Griswold told him, "nineteen statute; we are at a height of just about two hundred feet."

"Only nineteen miles? I thought it was much farther than that."

"Oh, no. At a height of fifty feet, one can see out only nine miles, statute; one hundred feet, thirteen miles; three hundred feet, twenty-three; four hundred, only twenty-six miles; and so on."

"I didn't know that. But how still," said Chantrell, gazing curiously about him, "it has become! I wasn't aware of the change until this mo-

ment. There is but the softest movement of the air now."

" 'Tis true," Griswold nodded, turning his head as though listening. "I didn't notice myself how marked the change was."

"And," added the other, "it seems warmer up here."

"It does. Probably that is because the breeze, gentle though it was, has fallen."

A thermometer at sea-level and another here at the summit would have shown a difference of more than 15°, Fahrenheit. Not that Griswold, had he known it, would have given this fact a second thought. Nor did he once think that something might be hidden there beyond that distant skyline. Nor would he have given *that* more than a second thought had he known it.

Already the Fairy Morgana was waving her wand—she whose magic was to bring the secret of Griswold and the man himself to wrack and utter ruin.

"Well," Griswold said suddenly, "let's go down, Ferdy."

His victim arose with alacrity.

"But," Griswold added, "not to the *Gorgon* just yet. Let's go over there," waving a hand toward the eastern extremity of the island.

The other made no response, and they made their way down in silence, the wolf-dog following, savage of visage and almost as noiseless as some gliding shadow.

Suddenly—they were then drawing near the edge of the rock wall, here some fifty feet in height—Griswold jerked out his revolver.

"Watch me," he said, his look upon a passing gull, "plug that fellow."

"What," Chantrell asked, "do you want to shoot the poor devil for?"

"Sport, Ferdy, sport. And just to see if my eye and hand are in trim. I used to be considered a crack shot with a revolver, Ferdy. But no," said Griswold, turning until the weapon was bearing directly upon the other, "why should I send a bullet into the bird? It never harmed me."

"Look out!" cried Chantrell. "Turn that thing the other way!"

He stepped quickly to one side, but the weapon followed him.

"Watch what you're doing! That thing's pointed right at me!"

"At you?" queried Griswold with simulated surprize. "I'm glad you told me, Ferdy. You see, I was thinking of something else."

The victim made another swift movement, but it was only to find, as before, that the weapon was still bearing upon him.

Then of a sudden Ferdinand Chantrell understood, and he stood very straight and still, looking squarely into the terrible, fiendish eyes of Griswold.

"Ha, ha!" said Griswold, his voice harsh and quivering with passion. "You see the joke now, Handsome Ferdy! You thought that I didn't mean it. You thought that I was acting when I wasn't and that I wasn't when I was. Ha, ha! If you have a prayer to make, Handsome Ferdy, be about it quick, for I am going to kill you as I said I would, and as I said I wouldn't—kill you and feed you to the fishes and the slimy things. You'll never steal another Amanda."

"You beast! You insane, cowardly beast!"

Griswold's answer was a taunting laugh.

Of a sudden the eyes of the victim moved, and the next instant they had fixed themselves, it seemed, on some object directly behind Griswold.

"Look!" cried Ferdinand Chantrell, pointing. *"Look at that!"*

But Griswold chuckled and shook his head knowingly.

"Don't think that you can play that old trick on me!" he said. "Don't you ever think, Handsome Ferdy,

that I'm going to look behind me. You are too close for one thing, and there isn't anything to see there, anyway."

"But there is something—*in the sky!*"

"In the sky! Ferdy, Ferdy! This puerile nonsense will never save you. *No!* Don't move another inch! Well, then, take *that* and *that!*"

Chantrell went staggering and collapsed upon his face, two bullets in his chest. With a heavy groan, he rolled over onto his back, his look upon the twisted, grinning face of Griswold.

"Not dead yet?" Griswold said. "Then take another. But no. I'll give you time, all the time you'll want, perhaps, to think over your sins and of what you will look like when the fishes are making of your handsome face a death's-head. Ah, you wince at that thought, Handsome Ferdy! You had your hour of triumph, and now I have mine. Glare away! If looks were daggers, my heart would be cut throbbing from my chest. But no look or word of yours can hurt me now. Probably, however, *this* will give you something else to think about."

He raised the revolver, took deliberate aim and sent a shattering bullet into Chantrell's right knee-cap. Again he fired, the bullet this time burying itself in the joint, right between the bones. Chantrell screamed.

Cuthbert Griswold looked down upon his victim and laughed in triumph and gloating.

"I told you!" he cried. "Now you are paying for those stolen kisses. You scream. What do you think of the price, eh? I told you that, before I was done with you, you would rue the day that you set eyes on Amanda."

"For God's sake," cried Chantrell, "kill me—*kill* me! If you are a man and not a fiend, send a bullet into my heart and end it!"

"Not yet, Handsome Ferdy. But here is one for your other knee-joint."

As the last word left his lips, Griswold fired. Chantrell did not scream this time, but his fingers dug at the rock until the flesh broke.

"Ha, ha! Were her kisses worth the price that you are paying, Handsome Ferdy? And I wonder if you know how sweet is this, the hour of my triumph. And it is all the sweeter because I shall never be called to account for it. Flang will keep its secret well, Ferdy."

Again he raised the weapon and, firing twice, smashed the left knee of his victim. Then he sent shattering bullets into Chantrell's elbows and wrists.

"Fainted at last," Griswold laughed. "A bullet into the heart and end it all? Well, here it is, Ferdy—now when you can not feel the mercy of it."

And so at last it was ended. There on the black rock lay the lifeless body of Ferdinand Chantrell—who had known the glory of a noble woman's love and the horror of a husband's vengeance. There it lay, a thing horrible to look upon but not so horrible, in blood and death, as the thing that stood and looked down upon it.

The wolf-dog crept forward and sniffed blood and corpse, then slunk back as though a sudden fear had entered the savage heart of it.

"Even Pluto!" Griswold said aloud. "Yes, even a wolf-dog slinks from the blood that warmed the false heart of him."

How long he stood there by the corpse, Griswold himself never knew —*though another did.* At last, however, he thrust the revolver into his pocket, seized the body, dragged it to the edge and sent it over into the sea.

For some moments—he did not know how long it was, *but one watch-*

ing did—he crouched there at the edge. The water was shallow there below, and he could make out the body of Chantrell, indistinct, blurred. At times it moved, for all the world like a thing endowed with life, but that was caused by the movements of the water itself.

Of a sudden these words of Chantrell flashed through Griswold's brain:

"But there is something—*in the sky!*"

Ha, ha! Ferdy had thought that he would fall for that old, old trick. Ferdy had thought that he would turn to look and that Ferdy could leap upon him. But he, Griswold, had been no such fool as that. *Something behind you!* That, whether spoken or looked, had brought many a man to grief; but it had not brought him. But—in the sky? Why had Ferdy said that it was in the sky?

Cuthbert Griswold arose and turned his look in the direction in which Chantrell had pointed.

What was that? There, there—*in the sky!* A dim, fading, hideous *face*, its look fixed upon him! *A face!*

Griswold dashed a hand across his eyes. A face? He laughed aloud. There was nothing there! His eyes, his brain had tricked him. A face, a face dim and fading and hideous and in the distant sky there above the sea! He would be seeing spirits next, fairies and goblins. What a strange weakness of nerves and brain! He had never dreamed that he would go like that. Such things were for women. But it would not happen again. A face—and in the sky! Again Griswold laughed aloud. A momentary weakness. Yes, nothing more—only the weakness of a moment. But he was himself now—was Cuthbert Griswold, he of the steady nerves and the sober brain. This, too, his hour of triumph! And Flang would keep his secret well!

4. Guy Oxford

"WELL, Pluto," said Griswold as he made his way back toward the *Gorgon*, "it's a little after 12; fine breeze, too, springing up now; but we won't get under way until the morning. Yes, we'll stay, *tillicum*—if for no other reason, just to show the spirit of Handsome Ferdy that we are not afraid to linger near his sepulcher. His spirit! Ha, ha! I wonder where the spirit of Ferdy is right now, Pluto."

And so it was, some hours later, that they found him there. Ships, Cuthbert Griswold had told himself, have a strange way of suddenly appearing in the most unlikely places and at most unlikely times. And there was the schooner *Queen Mab*, three-masted, white and beautiful, come to Flang, though Griswold did not know, what with the rock wall that shut off the view, until her little launch came putting in through the fissure. Of the six occupants of the launch, which came up alongside the sloop, two at once held the look and thoughts of Griswold. The first he knew at a glance to be a ship's officer—the *Queen Mab's* skipper, as he soon learned, Captain Spar. But it was the other man who really held Griswold's look. This individual was tall, lean to emaciation and with the blackest eyes that Cuthbert Griswold had ever seen in a human head, his look so impassive that Griswold wondered if a smile had ever touched a single lineament of that lean, swarthy visage of his. Cuthbert Griswold had not the slightest idea who or what this man was, but he distinctly felt, though he could not have told why, that the being before him was one amongst a million. And, in spite of himself, the murderer felt a chill pass through his heart when he learned that this man was the noted scientist and (at times) criminologist, Guy Oxford.

The next instant, however, he inwardly flung a savage curse at this weakness of his. Afraid? Why should he be afraid because this was Guy Oxford? True, the man had solved many a mystery that other investigators, the best to be had, had given up as insoluble; the powers of which this man sometimes showed himself the master seemed well-nigh uncanny; but, bah, what had he, Cuthbert Griswold, to fear from the presence, mysterious though that presence was, of Guy Oxford here on the Island of Flang? Mysterious? But why should there be anything mysterious about it? He was letting his imagination run riot. The *Queen Mab* and Guy Oxford would have come whether he, Griswold, had ever set foot on the island or not. It had just happened, that was all. But *why* had they come to Flang?

And then another fear, a fear sudden and terrible, went through the heart of the murderer. The blood! The blood there in that spot in which he had killed Chantrell! If he had only known, he would have removed that. But he had never dreamed. And the body too! But, then, one would have to look closely to see it; and why should anyone do that? The blood—but what on earth was the matter with him, anyway? For he could explain that. Explain it easily. Yes, *that* would be his explanation. What a fool to let such a fear get him! But would it work? Of course it would work—unless this cursed Guy Oxford were to place some of Chantrell's blood under the microscope. But why should Guy Oxford ever do that?

But the *Queen Mab*. Why had the *Queen Mab* come here to Flang?

"This is indeed a surprize, Mr. Oxford," said Cuthbert Griswold, "meeting you here in this God-forsaken sea, on this Island of Flang."

"The cruise of the *Queen Mab*," returned Oxford, "is a purely scientific one, and scientists, you know, sometimes visit strange places."

"Yes, yes; of course! Too bad, though," Griswold smiled, "that we haven't a mystery here for you to solve. But there is no mystery here."

"No, Mr. Griswold; there is no mystery here—to be solved."

Griswold chuckled to himself. Another joke, and wasn't it a good one, too? No mystery here. Ha, ha, if Guy Oxford only knew! Wasn't it a joke, though? Too bad he couldn't share it with them! It was a joke indeed. For Guy Oxford, as the murderer was soon to learn, *did* know.

"However," Griswold added, "if you had been here about noon, you would have seen murder done."

What a strange look was that which the captain flashed at Oxford! Strange, too, was that expression which, for a fleeting moment, Griswold saw in those strange black eyes of the scientist.

"Oh, don't misunderstand me, gentlemen!" Griswold laughed. "The victim was Buck, a wolf-dog, father to Pluto here. Went mad, and I had to kill the poor brute."

"Where," Captain Spar asked rather quickly, "did that happen?"

"Over there," replied Griswold, waving a hand, "at the eastern end of the island."

"I should like," Oxford said, "to visit that spot."

"*That* spot?"

The other nodded.

"Of course," said Griswold. "At once?"

"At once. Will you guide us to it?"

"With pleasure," Cuthbert Griswold told him with an inward shiver. "But—but why, Mr. Oxford, are you so interested in that spot? There is nothing there but blood."

"What did you do with the body?"

"Ah, I see; you are interested in rabies, as well as in all those scientific subjects—and in crime."

"I am interested," the scientist answered, "in everything."

"Of course, of course. As for the body, unfortunately I cast it into the sea. Poor Buck! I hated to kill the noble creature; but, when they go mad, there is nothing else that you can do."

"Of course," said Oxford. "But—well, Mr. Griswold, I am anxious to see that spot, anyway."

"Yes, yes; of course."

Still Griswold made no movement to conduct the other to it. The blood, that cursed telltale blood! Why had he mentioned it? But there. He had done the wise thing. Of course he had. They would, in all likelihood, have chanced upon the spot. And the blood was not telltale—unless examined under a microscope. And, now that he had mentioned it—mentioned it in so nonchalant a manner—there would be no suspicion, no examination under a microscope. So why was he hesitating? He must not hesitate a moment longer. That was the worst thing that he could do.

A few minutes, therefore, and they had reached the scene of the tragedy—the murderer himself, Oxford, Captain Spar and two sailors. Though he evinced not the slightest hesitation, the slightest uneasiness, yet a horrible fear had Griswold in its grip. It was as though this dark, mysterious Oxford *knew* something. Why had he been so anxious to come to this spot? Why, on the arriving there, had he motioned for the others to keep back, and why was he examining the place so keenly? And there! Look at that! He was thrusting a finger of his right hand right into a mass of the coagulated blood—the coagulated blood of Ferdinand Chantrell!

Griswold did not see Oxford's signal, but of a sudden he discovered that the others had come up to him, up to Griswold, that is—that Captain Spar stood at his right side, those two husky sailors at his left.

"Hum!" said Oxford, raising his look from his finger and fixing it upon the eyes of Cuthbert Griswold. "You say that this is the blood of a dog?"

"Yes, yes! Of course it was a dog! The blood of Buck!"

"Imaginary dogs," said the scientist, "don't have any blood at all."

"Why, why do you think, Mr. Oxford, that, that——?"

"I don't think," the other interrupted; "I know: this is not the blood of any canine; it is the blood of a human being, the blood of a man!"

"A man?"

Griswold barked out a sardonic laugh.

"I confess," he said, "that I don't see your little joke. There was no man here, only poor Buck."

"There was no dog here," Oxford told him, "save Pluto there. The victim was a man."

"Ha, ha!" said Griswold. "I must say, though, that you have a queer idea of humor, Mr. Oxford. Your humor is a little too grisly for me—even though your victim is only an imaginary one."

"Come, Griswold! You might as well make a clean breast of it. Why did you kill him and in a manner so brutal?"

"As I told you, because he went mad; and there was nothing brutal about it. Poor Buck! He was a noble creature."

Then a strange thing happened: Guy Oxford laughed. And that laugh sent a chill through and through the heart of the murderer.

"You—you fiend!" Griswold cried.

"Why a fiend?" Oxford queried sweetly.

"Well, you look like one, and you laugh like one, too."

"I do? Gently there, Griswold!" Oxford exclaimed softly. "I would suggest that you keep your hand

away from that revolver. Better get that weapon, Captain. No telling what he may try to do when he learns the truth."

Griswold's right hand made a sudden movement toward the piece, but the hand of Captain Spar was swifter, and thus, in a flash, Griswold found himself disarmed.

He laughed defiantly.

"Say, what's the idea? Is this the Island of——?"

" 'Tis the Island of the Fay."

"The fay?" Griswold ejaculated. "What fay?' '

"For the present," Guy Oxford answered, "she shall be nameless."

"So there is a fairy here?" And Griswold laughed harshly. "A fairy on Flang? Ha, ha! Why not Circe, Mr. Scientist, and make a good job of it?"

"My fairy," Guy Oxford told him, "did better than even Circe herself could have done."

"Oh, gosh!" Cuthbert Griswold exclaimed. "I suppose I'll be hearing about gnomes and spooks and goblins next. So Flang is the Island of the Fay? I thought, from the way you fellows are acting, that it was a movie studio in Hollywood. But what's the meaning of all this hocus-pocus and flubdub, anyway? What's the meaning of this grisly mummery —putting your finger into that gore and pretending you can see that it is human blood? No, you *see* more than that; you can even tell the sex of this imaginary victim that in reality was Buck. The victim, you say, was a man. Might it not have been a woman, or a baby, or—or a fairy?"

"It might, but it wasn't. And that isn't the only thing that I saw."

"On that bloody finger of yours?" Griswold asked.

Guy Oxford raised his hand and eyed the finger more closely than before.

"Do you want me to tell you?" he asked after some moments of silence.

"Of course. Tell me everything."

"It was not a dog," Guy Oxford said, "that you killed in this spot, Griswold. It was a man, and you murdered him in cold blood, in a manner most brutal and revolting. You felled him with two bullets in, in——"

Oxford eyed his finger very keenly.

"Yes, in the chest. Then you proceeded to torture him by smashing—at any rate, I believe that the bullets smashed them—his knee-joints, his elbows and his wrists."

A fierce, inhuman cry burst from Griswold.

"Shall I tell you more?" Guy Oxford queried. "Shall I tell you that you dragged the body over there to the edge and tumbled it off into the sea?"

"You—you cunning fiend!" Griswold cried. "You cunning, cursed fiend! Where were you hiding?"

"Then you confess the deed?"

"Why should I deny it any longer when you—oh, you cunning devil!—when you know everything? You fiend, oh, you crafty fiend! Yes, I confess it. Go over there to the edge and you can see his body."

"We'll do that presently, and we'll recover the body if that is possible. So you admit that you killed him?"

"Yes, I killed Handsome Ferdy—Handsome Ferdy Chantrell. And I would kill him again. Do you hear that? I would kill him again. I glory in the deed! I wish that I had him here so I could torture him once more! I would make a better job of it the second time. But you—you!"

Griswold glanced about a little wildly.

"Where were you hiding? There was no sail in sight. I went up to the very summit and made sure of that before I killed him. This, I thought, was one murder that would never out. But you—you saw it all."

"Yes," said Guy Oxford; "I saw it all."

"But where was your *Queen Mab* then? In God's name, where were you?"

Oxford turned and waved a hand to the southward.

"The *Queen Mab* was down there, distant something over thirty-five miles, statute, and so below the horizon to one standing on the very summit of this island."

"And you? Where were you hiding, and how had you got here on Flang?"

"I wasn't hiding," Guy Oxford told him. "And I wasn't here. I was on board the *Queen Mab,* and the vessel herself, as I have said, even the very tips of her masts, was hidden from here."

"Do you expect me to believe that? Why not give over this flubdub, Oxford? You were *here,* or you could not have *seen.* But you were seen! And I thought that it was only a trick of Ferdy's! Yes, you were seen, and I—I never dreamed it."

"You mean when he pointed—just before he made to spring at you and you shot him?"

"Yes," said Griswold. "But how could it have been you? He said that you—he said *it* was in the sky!"

Guy Oxford looked at Captain Spar, and Griswold saw a smile in those black (and to the murderer terrible) eyes of his.

"Up in the sky!" Guy Oxford said. "We were! Yes, we were in two places at once, though, of course, we didn't know that until I saw Chantrell point."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"About our being on the *Queen Mab's* deck and yet up in the sky. You should have turned, Griswold, turned and seen us there. Then, perhaps, your hour of triumph would not have proved your hour of disaster and ruin. And a fairy—Griswold, 'twas a fairy that did it all! I told you this is the Island of the Fay."

5. The Fairy Morgana

"A FAIRY?" Cuthbert Griswold exclaimed. "Do you expect me to believe such bosh? You a scientist and talking about fairies!"

"Your scientist," Oxford returned, "is the true believer in fairies—only he doesn't call them that, unless he happens to be in a poetic mood."

"You and all your fairies and your hocus-pocus and your flubdub be damned!" Griswold cried. "What I want to know is this: where were you hiding, and how had you got here? Handsome Ferdy no more dreamed than I did myself that another man was on this island, on this —ha, ha, this Island of the Fay."

"I told you that I wasn't here, that I was on board the *Queen Mab.* But I had an excellent little telescope. Oh, not one of your spy-glasses but an astronomical, fitted, of course, with a terrestrial eyepiece, so that the image is upright."

"But you were thirty-five miles away! A line drawn from the very summit of Flang—and I was one hundred and fifty feet below that—to the very tip of the *Queen Mab's* mainmast would be intercepted by the ocean. Can you, with this wonderful telescope of yours, see around curves?"

"No. But you forget my fairy! No telescope can enable a man to see what is on the other side of a hill; but my fairy has shown men that more than once. Do you want an instance? Here you are:

"Between Ramsgate, England, and Dover Castle, a hill intervenes—or did when this happened. Above this hill—to an observer at Ramsgate—only the turrets of the castle were visible. Yet Dr. Vince and a companion, on the 2nd of August, 1806, saw the whole castle itself. And not only did they see the whole of it, but the castle seemed to be *on their side* of the hill!

Oh, she's a wonderful fairy, Griswold."

The murderer groaned.

"Then," continued Guy Oxford, "there were the horsemen seen on Sonterfell, a hill in Scotland, in the year 1744. These figures, performing various military evolutions, were visible for over two hours, until darkness concealed them. Yet there was no man there where those troopers were moving; but a body of rebels were going through their exercises *on the other side of the fell!*

"There is the well-known Specter of the Brocken, too. Our fairy again, Griswold. And she visits the Lake of Killarney, also. Men moving along the shore of that romantic sheet often appear to be walking (or riding) out on the very lake itself—a phenomenon that doubtless explains the legend of O'Donoghue.

"'And spirits, from all the lake's deep bowers,
Glide o'er the blue waves scattering flowers,
Around my love and thee.'

"And we have a record of her visit in 1595 to desolate Nova Zembla, where, ending the long arctic night, she brought the sun to some shipwrecked Dutch sailors sixteen days before that on which he should have appeared according to calculation. The sun was more than four degrees below the horizon at the time; but our fairy waved her wand, and there he was shining in the sky.

"On Sunday, December the 17th, 1826, she was in the vicinity of Poitiers, and before three thousand worshipers (and just as one of the divines was speaking of that emblem of the Christian faith seen in the heavens by Constantine and his army) a cross suddenly took form in the sky—a great cross 'of a bright silver color, tinged with red.' A miracle, said the devout, while, according to the scientist, a magnified image of a cross which had been placed near the church had been 'cast on the concave surface of some atmospheric mirror.'

"In 1822, in the polar sea, she revealed her presence to Captain Scoresby by limning in the sky an inverted image of his father's ship, the *Fame,* which was almost as far from his own vessel as the *Queen Mab* was distant from Flang. In 1839 she was with Wilkes off Cape Horn. A favorite spot of hers is the Strait of Messina, so often transformed by our fairy's magic into a catoptric theater. There, for centuries, with her spectral witchery, she amazed and awed the ignorant and set at naught the explanations of the wise.*

"I think, Griswold," Oxford concluded, "that you know the name of my fairy now."

The murderer nodded and groaned aloud in bitterness of soul.

"The Fay Morgana!"

"The Fay Morgana," said Guy Oxford.

"I was so careful," Griswold cried, "so sure; this was one vengeance that would never out; and then, by a cursed mirage, to be brought to this!"

"There were two images of the isle," said Guy Oxford, "the lower inverted, the upper erect. Undoubtedly they were greatly magnified, certainly they appeared to be no farther off than five or six miles. Everything was extraordinarily distinct, so that, with telescopic aid, I saw you and your victim almost as plainly as though I had been here close at hand, instead of thirty-five miles away. In all likelihood, too, the image, or images, of the *Queen Mab* (seen by Chantrell) were as remarkable as those of the island itself."

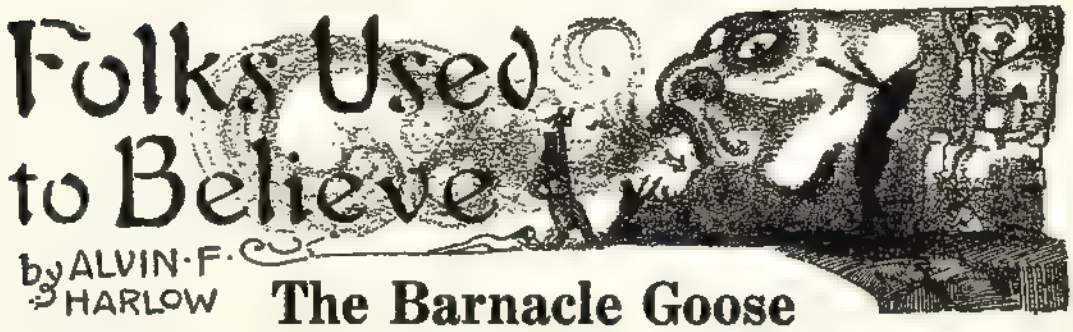
"And I thought," exclaimed Griswold bitterly, "that Flang would keep the secret well, the secret that in reality never was a secret at all,

* "The complexity of these phenomena [looming and mirage] is enormous, nor, except in most general terms, have they been adequately explained."—*Hastings.*

what with that cursed looming—that cursed Fairy Morgana, to use your poetical term. But the blood? Why did you put your finger into that blood?"

"I suppose I ought to be somewhat ashamed of that mummery," said Guy Oxford; "but I did it so that my perfect knowledge of the crime might be to you all the greater mystery. Revelation of the truth at that moment would have been premature.

"And, besides," he added, "you didn't believe in fairies then."



The Barnacle Goose

THE barnacle goose, which is a wild goose quite common in northern Europe, was given its name centuries ago because of a curious and inexplicable superstition; which was nothing less than that barnacles, the tiny shell-fish which attach themselves to ships' bottoms or floating timbers, eventually turn into geese! Barnacles are curious little mollusks which fasten themselves by a fleshy peduncle usually to wooden ships, and sometimes in such quantities that the ship must be put in dry dock and the hull scraped.

Many people in early days did not believe that these mollusks reproduced themselves, but fancied that they grew in some sort of spontaneous manner on tree trunks or in the crevices of decaying timber. Giambattista Porta, in his book on natural magic (published 1569) says, "Not only in Scotland but in the river of Thames by London, there is a kind of shell-fish which . . . commonly stick in the keel of some old ship. Some say they come of worms, some of the boughs of trees which fall into the sea. If any of them be cast upon shore, they die; but they which are swallowed still into the sea, live and get out of their shells, and grow to be ducks or such-like birds."

Butler remarks in *Hudibras:*

> "As Barnacles turn Poland Geese
> In th' Islands of the Orcades."

Gerarde gravely records in his *Herbal* (1597) that "in the north parts of Scotland and in the Islands called Orcades there are certain trees whereon these tree-geese and barnacles abound." He describes the resulting fowl as "bigger than a mallard and lesser than a goose, called by the Lancashire people a tree-goose."

It is said that there are still people on the northern Irish and Scottish coasts who believe that these geese are transformed from barnacles; and until recently, at least, the barnacle goose was eaten in France on fast days, on the belief that this was permissible because it was more of a fish than a fowl.

It Billowed Up from the Depths of the Cave

The Mist-Monster

By GRANVILLE S. HOSS

THE newspaper accounts stated that Judson McSweet had gone into a cave near his cabin and in the prevailing darkness wandered too near the brink of a chasm, situated about five hundred yards inside the cavern, where he lost his balance or stepped blindly into space and fell to destruction. He may have found his last resting-place at the bottom of that pit. I think he did, but not in the manner stated by the newspapers. I am going to tell you here just what occurred. It will be just a bald statement of facts, which I quite realize will sound much like the dream of a disturbed imagination.

McSweet had extended me a standing invitation to spend some time at his place. Well knowing my weakness, he represented the hunting and fishing as excellent, holding out alluring prospects of the sport to be enjoyed. It was long ere I could avail myself of his offer, but finally feeling that my affairs were in such shape that the business could be left with subordinates for a while, I wrote him to expect me early in November.

After an all-day journey I alighted at a small mountain station, where Judson met me with a spring wagon drawn by one horse, and in this vehicle, which was already well loaded with bundles, he placed my luggage. "Been stocking up a bit," he explained. "Although there is plenty of fish and game, we can't live on that alone. I like a variety."

McSweet was a small man, round and fat, entirely bald, with a cherubic face and mild blue eyes. He was dressed in rough outing clothes, a cap and top-boots. He had suddenly retired from business some years before and bought a small tract of ground with a two-room cabin where he had since lived alone. In explanation he had always answered that he preferred being next to nature; that the simple life met all his needs and suited him far better than the more complicated existence of the town or city.

As we jolted over the rocky road through the evening gloom, I was surprized by his silence. He had always been a jolly man, full of fun and overflowing with conversation. His face now, as I glanced at him occasionally, seemed set and strained. As we came to a particularly rough stretch of road the horse stumbled and almost fell. McSweet gave a vicious jerk at the reins and lashed the beast unmercifully, at the same time giving voice to several deep curses.

"What on earth is the matter, Mac?" I exclaimed. "You are not yourself at all. I noticed it at the station and have been marveling at the change in you ever since."

"Oh, it's nothing," he replied. "I'm all right, though I guess the devilish thing has gotten on my nerves a bit."

"What thing?" I demanded.

"I'll tell you in the morning. Here we are at the shack. We'll soon have a fire going and a supper good enough for your club. Anyway, it will be as substantial as anything they could give you there."

He unharnessed the horse, loosing him to range at will, and we soon had the contents of the wagon transferred to the house.

After a hearty repast we sat before the stove with our pipes while he asked innumerable questions about friends and acquaintances whom he had not seen or heard of since renouncing civilization and settling in the wild spot he now called home. About 10 o'clock we adjourned to the other room, two sides of which were fitted with bunks, while a third was lined with shelves filled with books and magazines. It was apparent how he was in the habit of spending his days and evenings. We were soon occupying the bunks, and I, for one, was not long in falling sound asleep.

I arose at dawn, but early as I was, McSweet was up and busied with breakfast. "Ah, Hatton," he exclaimed cheerfully, as I appeared in the doorway armed with rod and creel, "I see we are going to have fish for dinner, but bacon must suffice for breakfast."

"Not for dinner," I replied; "I am going to put up a lunch and make a day of it, but I can promise you some good ones for tonight, if you have not deceived me about how your streams abound with them."

We soon breakfasted, and as I prepared to depart, McSweet accompanied me to the door, where he paused, saying, "Hatton, I want particularly to call your attention to that cave you see about four hundred yards before us. Keep away from it during the afternoon hours, especially after 3 o'clock, as it is dangerous. The Indians have always lived in great fear of it and those around here now say that in times past, sacrifices, both human and animal, were made to the thing they believed to dwell in its depths. They call it the Cave of the Wind Devil. I do not know what it is, but I do know that it is something evil and horrible, and to go in there at certain hours is death. The spring from which I get my water is about ten yards inside the entrance and I am very careful not to require a supply of it after a certain hour."

"But what is it?" I asked. "Surely you must have some good reason for saying what you do and are not influenced by an old Indian superstition. What do you fear and what has happened to make you speak so positively of danger?"

"Superstition nothing! No, I am not influenced by the Indian legends, but have good reasons for saying what I do. I'll tell you more this evening and maybe show you something, too, if you return at the right time. But remember what I have said and keep away from the place."

He turned abruptly into the house, and there soon issued a prodigious rattling of pots and pans, indicating that no more information was to be had at that time. Wondering somewhat, I left the cabin, following a path which lay within about twenty feet of the cave, where I paused. The place looked ordinary enough, like hundreds of others to be found in all mountain regions. It may have been the result of what I had just heard, but as I stood gazing into the cavernous depths, I felt a chill creep along my spine and a sense of deadly fear steal over me. "Tut, tut," I muttered, "this will never do. Am I letting Mac's wild talk make a fool of me?" Turning in a sort of panic, I hurried on toward the river.

It was a fine morning, crisp and cold, with a touch of frost in the air. I pushed forward vigorously through the brambles and other dead growths of summer and soon reached my destination. McSweet had not exaggerated the abundance of fish, and in a short time my creel contained some fine ones. I built a fire about noon and ate my lunch, which I thoroughly enjoyed in spite of the fact

that it had become quite cold and somewhat dry.

About 3 o'clock I decided to return to the cabin. I had all the fish we could use, and while they were still biting, it seemed a shame to take more from the water than would supply our wants. Drawing near the clearing, I heard loud curses, then shouts, vengeful and gleeful in turn. As I hurried through the trees and around a small hill, a strange sight met my eyes. Judson McSweet was hopping about some distance in front of the cave and hurling stones into the mouth of it. "Ah you devil," he shouted, "how was that? So, you creeping monster! Right through you! There, you fiend! And there, and there, and there!"

I hurried toward him, my eyes fixed intently on the entrance to the cave. I could see nothing but a gray billowing mist which filled the entire opening. As his missiles disappeared into this mass, a puff of vapor would spurt forth much in the manner of smoke on the discharge of a gun. These spurts of vapor were accompanied by a horrible odor; a sickening, dead, carrion odor. As I drew nearer, I could feel the same sense of chilly fear steal over me which I had noticed in the morning. The cloud had by now receded into the depths of the cave and by the time I reached McSweet it had entirely disappeared. He stood panting from his exertions, shaking his fist, growling inaudibly.

"What on earth is the matter, Mac?" I exclaimed. "Have you gone crazy?"

"Did you see it?" he cried. "Oh, the inhuman devouring thing! Waiting to draw me into its cold clammy maw. And listen to it! It is angry and seems to be telling me that some day it will not fail." From the interior of the cavern came a wailing and roaring sound as of a high wind sweeping over a neglected graveyard.

"I saw nothing," I replied, "but a cloud of mist. Collect yourself. Why were you throwing stones and acting in such a wild manner?"

"That was it, Hatton, what you call mist. But it is not that. No, no. It is a deadly agency of some sort which destroys and leaves no trace."

"Why do you say that? It is true the stuff smelled rather bad, but so far as I could observe it did not seem capable of much harm. It is probably a mist which rises periodically from some subterranean river."

"Mist nothing! No, there is intelligence and power there. During the first months of my stay here my only companions were a cat and dog. Poor old Tom, it got him. During the hot weather he was in the habit of sleeping just at the mouth of the cave where it was cool. One day I was sitting in the door of my cabin when I suddenly heard a number of terrified squalls from the cave. Looking up I beheld poor Tom, his head and forefeet projecting from the vaporous mass. He seemed to be struggling desperately to get out, but was gradually sucked in; his cries ceased and the cloud retreated into the cavern. I hastened to the cave but he was gone. Since then I have seen several small animals disappear in a like manner. First a rabbit, then a fox and finally a wolf. They had apparently gone to the spring for water."

"Remarkable!" I exclaimed. "Can it be that the cloud we saw is some sort of poisonous vapor which rises at intervals from the depths of the earth and overcomes whatever living thing it envelops?"

"It can't be that, no. A gas of that nature would cause death but it certainly would not be able to remove the body of the victim. No, this is an intelligent agency of some sort, devilish and deadly. A dog would not fear gas, would it? Well, I had a dog, and after the disappearance of the cat I noticed what I had failed to ob-

serve before; that he would not go within a hundred feet of the cave. So one day I took him by the collar and dragged him to the entrance. He whined and struggled desperately, but I persisted and after getting a few feet within the cave, released him. The poor animal gave one terrified howl and dashed out, disappearing among the trees, and I have seen nothing more of him."

"It is certainly strange," I returned thoughtfully. "You say this cloud appears at regular intervals?"

"Not exactly, no. It is likely to come out at any time in the afternoon, though I have never seen it before 3 o'clock."

"We must make a careful investigation. Whatever the phenomenon is, you may be certain it is caused by natural agencies."

"I'm afraid any investigation will come to nothing," he answered rather despairingly. "I have just about adopted the Indian belief that the thing is a devil; something superhuman, anyway."

"Nonsense!" I replied. "Come on into the house; I have a fine creel of fish here. Let's give them our undivided attention and resume discussion of this queer thing in the morning."

After an excellent repast, we talked and read until bed time, but without recurring to the thing in the cave. Neither was it mentioned the next day, and as things turned out, it was never mentioned again. I spent the next three days hunting and fishing, keeping our table well supplied. As I drew near the cabin on my return the fourth day I was startled by wild cries and screams from the direction of the cave. "Help! Help! Oh, it's got me! Oh, the cold, clammy devil! Help! Help!"

I hurried forward, soon coming to the cave. The gray vapor filled the mouth of the cavern. McSweet's head and shoulders projected from the foggy mass, a look of unutterable fear on his round face. He clawed wildly at the empty air and it was plain to be seen that he was making desperate efforts to make his way out of the billowing mass, but was apparently held fast. "Courage, Mac," I shouted; "I'm here!"

As I neared him I brought up my gun, discharging the contents into the gray mass above his head, causing putrid spots of vapor to shoot forth where the charge had entered. Dropping the empty weapon, I rushed forward to seize him by the arms, but my shots seemed to have hastened the end, for he was suddenly enveloped in the cloud, which rapidly retreated into the cave.

I got out my flashlight and followed, but all was quiet and the air clear, though there was a noticeable odor of dead and moldy matter. I continued forward until I reached what was seemingly the edge of a precipice. My spotlight failed to find the bottom, and stones dropped gave back no sound. I shouted repeatedly, but the echo of my own voice was the only reply. Judson McSweet was gone.

I remained at the cabin two days longer, hoping against hope. The cloud, now seeming to me ominous and deadly, billowed from the mouth of the cave each day but I made no attempt to investigate its nature. Of course I gave no thought to the idea that it was of supernatural origin. Could it be possible, I wondered, for some slimy horrible monster of the Jurassic age, or some other period when the world was young, to survive and have its lair in those dark depths?—that it came up into the light each day in search of food and was able to mask its movements by discharging that evil-smelling vapor, much the same as the present-day octopus, in the depths of the ocean, surrounds itself with an inky blackness when attacked? I wonder.

A Short, Shuddery Tale Is

The Dream Snake

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

THE night was strangely still. As we sat upon the wide veranda, gazing out over the broad, shadowy lawns, the silence of the hour entered our spirits and for a long while no one spoke.

Then far across the dim mountains that fringed the eastern skyline, a faint haze began to glow, and presently a great golden moon came up, making a ghostly radiance over the land and etching boldly the dark clumps of shadows that were trees. A light breeze came whispering out of the east, and the unmowed grass swayed before it in long, sinuous waves, dimly visible in the moonlight; and from among the group upon the veranda there came a swift gasp, a sharp intake of breath that caused us all to turn and gaze.

Faming was leaning forward, clutching the arms of his chair, his face strange and pallid in the spectral light; a thin trickle of blood seeping from the lip in which he had set his teeth. Amazed, we looked at him, and suddenly he jerked about with a short, snarling laugh.

"There's no need of gawking at me like a flock of sheep!" he said irritably and stopped short. We sat bewildered, scarcely knowing what sort of reply to make, and suddenly he burst out again.

"Now I guess I'd better tell the whole thing or you'll be going off and putting me down as a lunatic. Don't interrupt me, any of you! I want to get this thing off my mind. You all know that I'm not a very imaginative man; but there's a thing, purely a figment of imagination, that has haunted me since babyhood. A dream!" He fairly cringed back in his chair as he muttered, "A dream! and God, what a dream! The first time—no, I can't remember the first time I ever dreamed it—I've been dreaming the hellish thing ever since I can remember. Now it's this way: there is a sort of bungalow, set upon a hill in the midst of wide grasslands—not unlike this estate; but this scene is in Africa. And I am living there with a sort of servant, a Hindoo. Just why I am there is never clear to my waking mind, though I am always aware of the reason in my dreams. As a man of a dream, I remember my past life (a life which in no way corresponds with my waking life), but when I am awake my subconscious mind fails to transmit these impressions. However, I think that I am a fugitive from justice and the Hindoo is also a fugitive. How the bungalow came to be there I can never remember, nor do I know in what part of Africa it is, though all these things are known to my dream self. But the bungalow is a small one of a very few rooms, and is situated upon the top of the hill, as I said. There are no other hills about and the grasslands stretch to the horizon in every direction; knee-high in some places, waist-high in others.

"Now the dream always opens as I am coming up the hill, just as the sun is beginning to set. I am carrying a broken rifle and I have been on

a hunting trip; how the rifle was broken, and the full details of the trip, I clearly remember—dreaming. But never upon waking. It is just as if a curtain were suddenly raised and a drama began; or just as if I were suddenly transferred to another man's body and life, remembering past years of that life, and not cognizant of any other existence. And that is the hellish part of it! As you know, most of us, dreaming, are, at the back of our consciousness, aware that we are dreaming. No matter how horrible the dream may become, we know that it is a dream, and thus insanity or possible death is staved off. But in this particular dream, there is no such knowledge. I tell you it is so vivid, so complete in every detail, that I wonder sometimes if that is not my real existence and this a dream! But no; for then I should have been dead years ago.

"As I was saying, I come up the hill and the first thing I am cognizant of that is out of the ordinary is a sort of track leading up the hill in an irregular way; that is, the grass is mashed down as if something heavy had been dragged over it. But I pay no especial attention to it, for I am thinking, with some irritation, that the broken rifle I carry is my only arm and that now I must forego hunting until I can send for another.

"You see, I remember thoughts and impressions of the dream itself, of the occurrences of the dream; it is the memories that the dream 'I' has, of that other dream existence that I can not remember. So. I come up the hill and enter the bungalow. The doors are open and the Hindoo is not there. But the main room is in confusion; chairs are broken, a table overturned. The Hindoo's dagger is lying upon the floor, but there is no blood anywhere.

"Now, in my dreams, I never remember the other dreams, as sometimes one does. Always it is the first dream, the first time. I always experience the same sensations, in my dreams, with as vivid a force as the first time I ever dreamed. So. I am not able to understand this. The Hindoo is gone, but (thus I ruminate, standing in the center of the disordered room) what did away with him? Had it been a raiding party of negroes they would have looted the bungalow and probably burned it. Had it been a lion, the place would have been smeared with blood. Then suddenly I remember the track I saw going up the hill, and a cold hand touches my spine; for instantly the whole thing is clear: the thing that came up from the grasslands and wrought havoc in the little bungalow could be naught else except a giant serpent. And as I think of the size of the spoor, cold sweat beads my forehead and the broken rifle shakes in my hand.

"Then I rush to the door in a wild panic, my only thought to make a dash for the coast. But the sun has set and dusk is stealing across the grasslands. And out there somewhere, lurking in the tall grass is that grisly thing—that horror. God!" The ejaculation broke from his lips with such feeling that all of us started, not realizing the tension we had reached. There was a second's silence, then he continued:

"So I bolt the doors and windows, light the lamp I have and take my stand in the middle of the room. And I stand like a statue—waiting—listening. After a while the moon comes up and her haggard light drifts through the windows. And I stand still in the center of the room; the night is very still—something like this night; the breeze occasionally whispers through the grass, and each time I start and clench my hands until the nails bite into the flesh and the blood trickles down my wrists—and I stand there and wait and listen but it does not come that

night!" The sentence came suddenly and explosively, and an involuntary sigh came from the rest; a relaxing of tension.

"I am determined, if I live the night through, to start for the coast early the next morning, taking my chance out there in the grim grasslands—with it. But with morning, I dare not. I do not know in which direction the monster went; and I dare not risk coming upon him in the open, unarmed as I am. So, as in a maze, I remain at the bungalow, and ever my eyes turn toward the sun, lurching relentlessly down the sky toward the horizon. Ah, God! if I could but halt the sun in the sky!"

The man was in the clutch of some terrific power; his words fairly leaped at us.

"Then the sun rocks down the sky and the long gray shadows come stalking across the grasslands. Dizzy with fear, I have bolted the doors and windows and lighted the lamp long before the last faint glow of twilight fades. The light from the windows may attract the monster, but I dare not stay in the dark. And again I take my stand in the center of the room—waiting."

There was a shuddersome halt. Then he continued, barely above a whisper, moistening his lips: "There is no knowing how long I stand there; Time has ceased to be and each second is an eon; each minute is an eternity stretching into endless eternities. Then, God! but what is that?" he leaned forward, the moonlight etching his face into such a mask of horrified listening that each of us shivered and flung a hasty glance over our shoulders.

"Not the night breeze this time," he whispered. "Something makes the grasses swish-swish—as if a great, long, pliant weight were being dragged through them. Above the bungalow it swishes and then ceases—in front of the door; then the hinges creak—creak! the door begins to bulge inward—a small bit—then some more!" The man's arms were held in front of him, as if braced strongly against something, and his breath came in quick gasps. "And I know I should lean against the door and hold it shut, but I do not, I can not move. I stand there, like a sheep waiting to be slaughtered—but the door holds!" Again that sigh expressive of pent-up feeling.

He drew a shaky hand across his brow. "And all night I stand in the center of that room, as motionless as an image, except to turn slowly, as the swish-swish of the grass marks the fiend's course about the house. Ever I keep my eyes in the direction of that soft, sinister sound. Sometimes it ceases for an instant, or for several minutes, and then I stand scarcely breathing, for a horrible obsession has it that the serpent has in some way made entrance into the bungalow, and I start and whirl this way and that, frightfully fearful of making a noise, though I know not why, but ever with the feeling that the thing is at my back. Then the sounds commence again and I freeze motionless.

"Now here is the only time that my consciousness, which guides my waking hours, ever in any way pierces the veil of dreams. I am, in the dream, in no way conscious that it is a dream, but, in a detached sort of way, my other mind recognizes certain facts and passes them on to my sleeping—shall I say 'ego'? That is to say, my personality is for an instant truly dual and separate to an extent, as the right and left arms are separate, while making up parts in the same entity. My dreaming mind has no cognizance of my higher mind; for the time being the other mind is subordinated and the subconscious mind is in full control, to such an extent that it does not even recognize

the existence of the other. But the conscious mind, now sleeping, is cognizant of dim thought-waves emanating from the dream mind. I know that I have not made this entirely clear, but the fact remains that I know that my mind, conscious and subconscious, is near to ruin. My obsession of fear, as I stand there in my dream, is that the serpent will raise itself and peer into the window at me. And I know, in my dream, that if this occurs I shall go insane. And so vivid is the impression imparted to my conscious, now sleeping mind that the thought-waves stir the dim seas of sleep, and somehow I can feel my sanity rocking as my sanity rocks in my dream. Back and forth it totters and sways until the motion takes on a physical aspect and I in my dream am swaying from side to side. Not always is the sensation the same, but I tell you, if that horror ever raises its terrible shape and leers at me, if I ever see the fearful thing in my dream, I shall become stark, wild insane." There was a restless movement among the rest.

"God! but what a prospect!" he muttered. "To be insane and forever dreaming that same dream, night and day! But there I stand, and centuries go by, but at last a dim gray light begins to steal through the windows, the swishing dies away in the distance and presently a red, haggard sun climbs the eastern sky. Then I turn about and gaze into a mirror—and my hair has become perfectly white. I stagger to the door and fling it wide. There is nothing in sight but a wide track leading away down the hill through the grasslands—in the opposite direction from that which I would take toward the coast. And with a shriek of maniacal laughter, I dash down the hill and race across the grasslands. I race until I drop from exhaustion, then I lie until I can stagger up and go on.

"All day I keep this up, with superhuman effort, spurred on by the horror behind me. And ever as I hurl myself forward on weakening legs, ever as I lie gasping for breath, I watch the sun with a terrible eagerness. How swiftly the sun travels when a man races it for life! A losing race it is, as I know when I watch the sun sinking toward the skyline, and the hills which I had hoped to gain ere sundown seemingly as far away as ever."

His voice was lowered and instinctively we leaned toward him; he was gripping the chair arms and the blood was seeping from his lip.

"Then the sun sets and the shadows come and I stagger on and fall and rise and reel on again. And I laugh, laugh, laugh! Then I cease, for the moon comes up and throws the grasslands in ghostly and silvery relief. The light is white across the land, though the moon itself is like blood. And I look back the way I have come—and far—back"— all of us leaned farther toward him, our hair a-prickle; his voice came like a ghostly whisper—"far back—I—see—the—grass—waving. There is no breeze, but the tall grass parts and sways in the moonlight, in a narrow, sinuous line—far away, but nearing every instant." His voice died away.

Somebody broke the ensuing stillness: "And then——?"

"Then I awake. Never yet have I seen the foul monster. But that is the dream that haunts me, and from which I have wakened, in my childhood screaming, in my manhood in cold sweat. At irregular intervals I dream it, and each time, lately"—he hesitated and then went on—"each time lately, the thing has been getting closer—closer—the waving of the grass marks his progress and he nears me with each dream; and when he reaches me, then——"

He stopped short, then without a

word rose abruptly and entered the house. The rest of us sat silent for awhile, then followed him, for it was late.

How long I slept I do not know, but I woke suddenly with the impression that somewhere in the house someone had laughed, long, loud and hideously, as a maniac laughs. Starting up, wondering if I had been dreaming, I rushed from my room, just as a truly horrible shriek echoed through the house. The place was now alive with other people who had been awakened, and all of us rushed to Faming's room, whence the sounds had seemed to come.

Faming lay dead upon the floor, where it seemed he had fallen in some terrific struggle. There was no mark upon him, but his face was terribly distorted; as the face of a man who had been crushed by some superhuman force—such as some gigantic snake.

WEIRD STORY REPRINT

*Clarimonde**

By THEOPHILE GAUTIER

BROTHER, you ask me if I have ever loved. Yes. My story is a strange and terrible one; and though I am sixty-six years of age, I scarcely dare even now to disturb the ashes of that memory. To you I can refuse nothing; but I should not relate such a tale to any less experienced mind. So strange were the circumstances of my story that I can scarcely believe myself to have ever actually been a party to them. For more than three years I remained the victim of a most singular and diabolical illusion. Poor country priest though I was, I led every night in a dream—would to God it had been all a dream!—a most worldly life, a damning life, a life of Sardanapalus. One single look too freely cast upon a woman well-nigh caused me to lose my soul; but finally by the grace of God and the assistance of my patron saint I succeeded in casting out the evil spirit that possessed me. My daily life was long interwoven with a nocturnal life of a totally different character. By day I was a priest of the Lord, occupied with prayer and sacred things; by night, from the instant that I closed my eyes I became a young nobleman, a fine connoisseur in women, dogs and horses; gambling, drinking, and blaspheming; and when I awoke at early daybreak it seemed to me, on the other hand, that I had been sleeping, and had only dreamed that I was a priest. Of this somnambulistic life there now remains to me only the recollection of certain scenes and words which I can not banish from my memory; but although I never actually left the walls of my presbytery, one would think to hear me speak that I were a man who, weary of all worldly pleasures, had

* *La Morte Amoureuse*, translated by Lafcadio Hearn from the French.

become a religious, seeking to end a tempestuous life in the service of God, rather than a humble seminarist who has grown old in this obscure curacy, situated in the depths of the woods and even isolated from the life of the century.

Yes, I have loved as none in the world ever loved—with an insensate and furious passion—so violent that I am astonished it did not cause my heart to burst asunder. Ah, what nights—what nights!

From my earliest childhood I had felt a vocation to the priesthood, so that all my studies were directed with that idea in view. Up to the age of twenty-four my life had been only a prolonged novitiate. Having completed my course of theology I successively received all the minor orders, and my superiors judged me worthy, despite my youth, to pass the last awful degree. My ordination was fixed for Easter week.

I had never gone into the world. My world was confined by the walls of the college and the seminary. I knew in a vague sort of a way that there was something called Woman, but I never permitted my thoughts to dwell on such a subject, and I lived in a state of perfect innocence. Twice a year only I saw my infirm and aged mother, and in those visits were comprised my sole relations with the outer world.

I regretted nothing; I felt not the least hesitation at taking the last irrevocable step; I was filled with joy and impatience. Never did a betrothed lover count the slow hours with more feverish ardor; I slept only to dream that I was saying mass; I believed there could be nothing in the world more delightful than to be a priest; I would have refused to be a king or a poet in preference. My ambition could conceive of no loftier aim.

I tell you this in order to show you that what happened to me could not have happened in the natural order of things, and to enable you to understand that I was the victim of an inexplicable fascination.

At last the great day came. I walked to the church with a step so light that I fancied myself sustained in air, or that I had wings upon my shoulders. I believed myself an angel, and wondered at the somber and thoughtful faces of my companions, for there were several of us. I had passed all the night in prayer, and was in a condition well nigh bordering on ecstasy. The bishop, a venerable old man, seemed to me God the Father leaning over His eternity, and I beheld heaven through the vault of the temple.

You well know the details of that ceremony—the benediction, the communion under both forms, the anointing of the palms of the hands with the Oil of Catechumens, and then the holy sacrifice offered in concert with the bishop.

Ah, truly spake Job when he declared that the imprudent man is one who hath not made a covenant with his eyes! I accidentally lifted my head, which until then I had kept down, and beheld before me, so close that it seemed I could have touched her—although she was actually a considerable distance from me and on the farther side of the sanctuary railing—a young woman of extraordinary beauty and attired with royal magnificence. It seemed as though scales had suddenly fallen from my eyes. I felt like a blind man who unexpectedly recovers his sight. The bishop, so radiantly glorious but an instant before, suddenly vanished away, the tapers paled upon their golden candlesticks like stars in the dawn, and a vast darkness seemed to fill the whole church. The charming creature appeared in bright relief against the background of that darkness, like some angelic revelation. She seemed herself radiant, and radiating light rather than receiving it.

I lowered my eyelids, firmly resolved not to open them again, that I might not be influenced by external objects, for distraction had gradually taken possession of me until I hardly knew what I was doing.

In another minute, nevertheless, I reopened my eyes, for through my eyelashes I still beheld her all sparkling with prismatic colors, and surrounded with such a penumbra as one beholds in gazing at the sun.

OH, HOW beautiful she was! The greatest painters, who followed ideal beauty into heaven itself, and thence brought back to earth the true portrait of the Madonna, never in their delineations even approached that wildly beautiful reality which I saw before me. Neither the verses of the poet nor the palette of the artist could convey any conception of her. She was rather tall, with a form and bearing of a goddess. Her hair, of a soft blond hue, was parted in the midst and flowed back over her temples in two rivers of rippling gold; she seemed a diademed queen. Her forehead, bluish-white in its transparency, extended its calm breadth above the arches of her eyebrows, which by a strange singularity were almost black, and admirably relieved the effect of sea-green eyes of unsustainable vivacity and brilliancy. What eyes! With a single flash they could have decided a man's destiny. They had a life, a limpidity, an ardor, a humid light which I have never seen in human eyes; they shot forth rays like arrows, which I could distinctly *see* enter my heart. I know not if the fire which illumined them came from heaven or from hell, but assuredly it came from one or the other. That woman was either an angel or demon, perhaps both. Assuredly she never sprang from the flank of Eve, our common mother. Teeth of the most lustrous pearl gleamed in her ruddy smile, and at every inflection of her lips little dimples appeared in the satiny rose of her adorable cheeks. There was a delicacy and pride in the regal outline of her nostrils bespeaking noble blood. Agate gleams played over the smooth, lustrous skin of her half-bare shoulders, and strings of great blond pearls—almost equal to her neck in beauty of color—descended upon her bosom. From time to time she elevated her head with the undulating grace of a startled serpent or peacock, thereby imparting a quivering motion to the high lace ruff which surrounded it like a silver trelliswork.

She wore a robe of orange-red velvet, and from her wide ermine-lined sleeves there peeped forth patrician hands of infinite delicacy, and so ideally transparent that, like the fingers of Aurora, they permitted the light to shine through them.

All these details I can recollect at this moment as plainly as though they were of yesterday, for notwithstanding I was greatly troubled at the time, nothing escaped me; the faintest touch of shading, the little dark speck at the point of the chin, the imperceptible down at the corners of the lips, the velvety floss upon the brow, the quivering shadows of the eyelashes upon the cheeks—I could notice everything with astonishing lucidity of perception.

And gazing I felt opening within me gates that had until then remained closed; vents long obstructed became all clear, permitting glimpses of unfamiliar perspectives within; life suddenly made itself visible to me under a totally novel aspect. I felt as though I had just been born into a new world and a new order of things. A frightful anguish commenced to torture my heart as with red-hot pincers. Every successive minute seemed to me at once but a second and yet a century. Meanwhile the ceremony was proceeding, and I shortly found myself transported far from that world of which my newly born desires were furiously

besieging the entrance. Nevertheless I answered "Yes" when I wished to say "No," though all within me protested against the violence done to my soul by my tongue. Some occult power seemed to force the words from my throat against my will. Thus it is, perhaps, that so many young girls walk to the altar firmly resolved to refuse in a startling manner the husband imposed upon them, and that yet not one ever fulfils her intention. Thus it is, doubtless, that so many poor novices take the veil, though they have resolved to tear it into shreds at the moment when called upon to utter the vows. One dares not thus cause so great a scandal to all present, nor deceive the expectation of so many people. All those eyes, all those wills seem to weigh down upon you like a cope of lead, and, moreover, measures have been so well taken, everything has been so thoroughly arranged beforehand and after a fashion so evidently irrevocable, that the will yields to the weight of circumstances and utterly breaks down.

As the ceremony proceeded the features of the fair unknown changed their expression. Her look had at first been one of caressing tenderness; it changed to an air of disdain and of mortification, as though at not having been able to make itself understood.

With an effort of will sufficient to have uprooted a mountain, I strove to cry out that I would not be a priest, but I could not speak; my tongue seemed nailed to my palate, and I found it impossible to express my will by the least syllable of negation. Though fully awake, I felt like one under the influence of a nightmare, who vainly strives to shriek out the one word upon which life depends.

She seemed conscious of the martyrdom I was undergoing, and, as though to encourage me, she gave me a look replete with divinest promise. Her eyes were a poem; their every glance was a song.

She said to me:

"If thou wilt be mine, I shall make thee happier than God Himself in His paradise. The angels themselves will be jealous of thee. Tear off that funeral shroud in which thou art about to wrap thyself. I am Beauty, I am Youth, I am Life. Come to me! Together we shall be Love. Can Jehovah offer thee aught in exchange? Our lives will flow on like a dream, in one eternal kiss.

"Fling forth the wine of that chalice, and thou art free. I will conduct thee to the Unknown Isles. Thou shalt sleep in my bosom upon a bed of massy gold under a silver pavilion, for I love thee and would take thee away from thy God, before Whom so many noble hearts pour forth floods of love which never reach even the steps of His throne!"

These words seemed to float to my ears in a rhythm of infinite sweetness, for her look was actually sonorous, and the utterances of her eyes were re-echoed in the depths of my heart as though living lips had breathed them into my life. I felt myself willing to renounce God, and yet my tongue mechanically fulfilled all the formalities of the ceremony. The fair one gave me another look, so beseeching, so despairing that keen blades seemed to pierce my heart, and I felt my bosom transfixed by more swords than those of Our Lady of Sorrows.

All was consummated; I had become a priest.

Never was deeper anguish painted on human face than upon hers. The maiden who beholds her affianced lover suddenly fall dead at her side, the mother bending over the empty cradle of her child, Eve seated at the threshold of the gate of Paradise, the miser who finds a stone substituted for his stolen treasure, the poet who accidentally permits the only manuscript of his finest work to fall into

the fire, could not wear a look so despairing, so inconsolable. All the blood had abandoned her charming face, leaving it whiter than marble; her beautiful arms hung lifelessly on either side of her body as though their muscles had suddenly relaxed, and she sought the support of a pillar, for her yielding limbs almost betrayed her. As for myself, I staggered toward the door of the church, livid as death, my forehead bathed with a sweat bloodier than that of Calvary; I felt as though I were being strangled; the vault seemed to have flattened down upon my shoulders, and it seemed to me that my head alone sustained the whole weight of the dome.

As I was about to cross the threshold a hand suddenly caught mine—a woman's hand! I had never till then touched the hand of any woman. It was cold as a serpent's skin, and yet its impress remained upon my wrist, burnt there as though branded by a glowing iron. It was she. "Unhappy man! Unhappy man! What hast thou done?" she exclaimed in a low voice, and immediately disappeared in the crowd.

The aged bishop passed by. He cast a severe and scrutinizing look upon me. My face presented the wildest aspect imaginable: I blushed and turned pale alternately; dazzling lights flashed before my eyes. A companion took pity on me. He seized my arm and led me out. I could not possibly have found my way back to the seminary unassisted. At the corner of a street, while the young priest's attention was momentarily turned in another direction, a negro page, fantastically garbed, approached me, and without pausing on his way slipped into my hand a little pocket-book with gold-embroidered corners, at the same time giving me a sign to hide it. I concealed it in my sleeve, and there kept it until I found myself alone in my cell. Then I opened the clasp. There were only two leaves within, bearing the words, "Clarimonde. At the Concini Palace." So little acquainted was I at that time with the things of this world that I had never heard of Clarimonde, celebrated as she was, and I had no idea as to where the Concini Palace was situated. I hazarded a thousand conjectures, each more extravagant than the last; but, in truth, I cared little whether she were a great lady or a courtezan, so that I could but see her once more.

My love, although the growth of a single hour, had taken imperishable root. I did not even dream of attempting to tear it up, so fully was I convinced such a thing would be impossible. That woman had completely taken possession of me. One look from her had sufficed to change my very nature. She had breathed her will into my life, and I no longer lived in myself, but in her and for her. I gave myself up to a thousand extravagancies. I kissed the place upon my hand which she had touched, and I repeated her name over and over again for hours in succession. I only needed to close my eyes in order to see her distinctly as though she were actually present; and I reiterated to myself the words she had uttered in my ear at the church porch: "Unhappy man! Unhappy man! What hast thou done?" I comprehended at last the full horror of my situation, and the funereal and awful restraints of the state into which I had just entered became clearly revealed to me. To be a priest!—that is, to be chaste, to never love, to observe no distinction of sex or age, to turn from the sight of all beauty, to put out one's own eyes, to hide for ever crouching in the chill shadows of some church or cloister, to visit none but the dying, to watch by unknown corpses, and ever bear about with one the black soutane as a garb of mourning for oneself, so

that your very dress might serve as a pall for your coffin.

And I felt life rising within me like a subterranean lake, expanding and overflowing; my blood leaped fiercely through my arteries; my long-restrained youth suddenly burst into active being, like the aloe which blooms but once in a hundred years, and then bursts into blossom with a clap of thunder.

What could I do in order to see Clarimonde once more? I had no pretext to offer for desiring to leave the seminary, not knowing any person in the city. I would not even be able to remain there but a short time, and was only waiting my assignment to the curacy which I must thereafter occupy. I tried to remove the bars of the window; but it was at a fearful height from the ground, and I found that as I had no ladder it would be useless to think of escaping thus. And, furthermore, I could descend thence only by night in any event, and afterward how should I be able to find my way through the inextricable labyrinth of streets? All these difficulties, which to many would have appeared altogether insignificant, were gigantic to me, a poor seminarist who had fallen in love only the day before for the first time, without experience, without money, without attire.

"Ah!" cried I to myself in my blindness, "were I not a priest I could have seen her every day; I might have been her lover, her spouse. Instead of being wrapped in this dismal shroud of mine I would have had garments of silk and velvet, golden chains, a sword, and fair plumes like other handsome young cavaliers. My hair, instead of being dishonored by the tonsure, would flow down upon my neck in waving curls; I would have a fine waxed mustache; I would be a gallant." But one hour passed before an altar, a few hastily articulated words, had for ever cut me off from the number of the living, and I had myself sealed down the stone of my own tomb; I had with my own hand bolted the gate of my prison!

I went to the window. The sky was beautifully blue; the trees had donned their spring robes; nature seemed to be making parade of an ironical joy. The Place was filled with people, some going, others coming; young beaux and young beauties were sauntering in couples toward the groves and gardens; merry youths passed by, cheerily trolling refrains of drinking-songs—it was all a picture of vivacity, life, animation, gayety, which formed a bitter contrast with my mourning and my solitude. On the steps of the gate sat a young mother playing with her child. She kissed its rosy mouth still impearled with drops of milk, and performed, in order to amuse it, a thousand divine little puerilities such as only mothers know how to invent. The father standing at a little distance smiled gently upon the charming group, and with folded arms seemed to hug his joy to his heart. I could not endure that spectacle. I closed the window with violence, and flung myself on my bed, my heart filled with frightful hate and jealousy, and gnawed my fingers and my bed-covers like a tiger that had passed ten days without food.

I know not how long I remained in this condition, but at last, while writhing on the bed in a fit of spasmodic fury, I suddenly perceived the Abbé Sérapion, who was standing erect in the center of the room, watching me attentively. Filled with shame of myself, I let my head fall upon my breast and covered my face with my hands.

"Romuald, my friend, something very extraordinary is transpiring within you," observed Sérapion, after a few moments' silence; "your conduct is altogether inexplicable. You—always so quiet, so pious, so gentle—you to rage in your cell like a wild beast! Take heed, brother—do not

listen to the suggestion of the devil. The Evil Spirit, furious that you have consecrated yourself for ever to the Lord, is prowling around you like a ravening wolf and making a last effort to obtain possession of you. Instead of allowing yourself to be conquered, my dear Romuald, make to yourself a cuirass of prayers, a buckler of mortifications, and combat the enemy like a valiant man; you will then assuredly overcome him. Virtue must be proved by temptation, and gold comes forth purer from the hands of the assayer. Fear not. Never allow yourself to become discouraged. The most watchful and stedfast souls are at moments liable to such temptation. Pray, fast, meditate, and the Evil Spirit will depart from you."

The words of the Abbé Sérapion restored me to myself, and I became a little more calm. "I came," he continued, "to tell you that you have been appointed to the curacy of C———. The priest who had charge of it has just died, and Monseigneur the Bishop has ordered me to have you installed there at once. Be ready, therefore, to start tomorrow." I responded with an inclination of the head, and the abbé retired. I opened my missal and commenced reading some prayers, but the letters became confused and blurred under my eyes, the thread of the ideas entangled itself hopelessly in my brain, and the volume at last fell from my hands without my being aware of it.

To leave tomorrow without having been able to see her again, to add yet another barrier to the many already interposed between us, to lose for ever all hope of being able to meet her, except, indeed, through a miracle! Even to write to her, alas! would be impossible, for by whom could I dispatch my letter? With my sacred character of priest, to whom could I dare unbosom myself, in whom could I confide? I became a prey to the bitterest anxiety.

Then suddenly recurred to me the words of the Abbé Sérapion regarding the artifices of the devil; and the strange character of the adventure, the supernatural beauty of Clarimonde, the phosphoric light of her eyes, the burning imprint of her hand, the agony into which she had thrown me, the sudden change wrought within me when all my piety vanished in a single instant—these and other things clearly testified to the work of the Evil One and perhaps that satiny hand was but the glove which concealed his claws. Filled with terror at these fancies, I again picked up the missal which had slipped from my knees and fallen upon the floor, and once more gave myself up to prayer.

Next morning Sérapion came to take me away. Two mules freighted with our miserable valises awaited us at the gate. He mounted one, and I the other as well as I knew how.

As we passed along the streets of the city, I gazed attentively at all the windows and balconies in the hope of seeing Clarimonde, but it was yet early in the morning, and the city had hardly opened its eyes. Mine sought to penetrate the blinds and window-curtains of all the palaces before which we were passing. Sérapion doubtless attributed this curiosity to my admiration of the architecture, for he slackened the pace of his animal in order to give me time to look around me. At last we passed the city gates and commenced to mount the hill beyond. When we arrived at its summit I turned to take a last look at the place where Clarimonde dwelt. The shadow of a great cloud hung over all the city; the contrasting colors of its blue and red roofs were lost in the uniform half-tint, through which here and there floated upward, like white flakes of foam, the smoke of freshly kindled fires. By a singular optical effect one edifice, which surpassed in

height all the neighboring buildings that were still dimly veiled by the vapors, towered up, fair and lustrous with the gilding of a solitary beam of sunlight—although actually more than a league away it seemed quite near. The smallest details of its architecture were plainly distinguishable—the turrets, the platforms, the window-casements, and even the swallow-tailed weathervanes.

"What is that palace I see over there all lighted up by the sun?" I asked Sérapion. He shaded his eyes with his hand, and having looked in the direction indicated, replied: "It is the ancient palace which the Prince Concini has given to the courtezan Clarimonde. Awful things are done there!"

At that instant—I know not yet whether it was a reality or an illusion—I fancied I saw gliding along the terrace a shapely white figure, which gleamed for a moment in passing and as quickly vanished. It was Clarimonde.

Oh, did she know that at that very hour, all feverish and restless—from the height of the rugged road which separated me from her, and which, alas! I could never more descend—I was directing my eyes upon the palace where she dwelt and which a mocking beam of sunlight seemed to bring nigh to me, as though inviting me to enter therein as its lord? Undoubtedly she must have known it, for her soul was too sympathetically united with mine not to have felt its least emotional thrill, and that subtle sympathy it must have been which prompted her to climb—although clad only in her nightdress—to the summit of the terrace, amid the icy dews of the morning.

The shadow gained the palace, and the scene became to the eye only a motionless ocean of roofs and gables, amid which one mountainous undulation was distinctly visible. Sérapion urged his mule forward, my own at once followed at the same gait, and a sharp angle in the road at last hid the city of S——— for ever from my eyes, as I was destined never to return thither. At the close of a weary three days' journey through dismal country fields, we caught sight of the cock upon the steeple of the church which I was to take charge of, peeping above the trees, and after having followed some winding roads fringed with thatched cottages and little gardens, we found ourselves in front of the façade, which certainly possessed few features of magnificence. A porch ornamented with some moldings, and two or three pillars rudely hewn from sandstone; a tiled roof with counterforts of the same sandstone as the pillars—that was all. To the left lay the cemetery, overgrown with high weeds, and having a great iron cross rising up in its center; to the right stood the presbytery under the shadow of the church. It was a house of the most extreme simplicity and frigid cleanliness. We entered the enclosure. A few chickens were picking up some oats scattered upon the ground; accustomed, seemingly, to the black habit of ecclesiastics, they showed no fear of our presence and scarcely troubled themselves to get out of our way. A hoarse, wheezy barking fell upon our ears, and we saw an aged dog running toward us.

It was my predecessor's dog. He had dull bleared eyes, grizzled hair, and every mark of the greatest age to which a dog can possibly attain. I patted him gently, and he proceeded at once to march along beside me with an air of satisfaction unspeakable. A very old woman, who had been the housekeeper of the former curé, also came to meet us, and after having invited me into a little back parlor, asked whether I intended to retain her. I replied that I would take care of her, and the dog, and the chickens, and all the furniture her master had bequeathed her at his death. At this she became fairly transported with joy, and the Abbé Sérapion at once

paid her the price which she asked for her little property.

As soon as my installation was over, the Abbé Sérapion returned to the seminary. I was, therefore, left alone, with no one but myself to look to for aid or counsel. The thought of Clarimonde again began to haunt me, and in spite of all my endeavors to banish it, I always found it present in my meditations. One evening, while promenading in my little garden along the walks bordered with box-plants, I fancied that I saw through the elm-trees the figure of a woman, who followed my every movement, and that I beheld two sea-green eyes gleaming through the foliage; but it was only an illusion, and on going round to the other side of the garden, I could find nothing except a footprint on the sanded walk—a footprint so small that it seemed to have been made by the foot of a child. The garden was enclosed by very high walls. I searched every nook and corner of it, but could discover no one there. I have never succeeded in fully accounting for this circumstance, which, after all, was nothing compared with the strange things which happened to me afterward.

For a whole year I lived thus, filling all the duties of my calling with the most scrupulous exactitude, praying and fasting, exhorting and lending spiritual aid to the sick, and bestowing alms even to the extent of frequently depriving myself of the very necessaries of life. But I felt a great aridness within me, and the sources of grace seemed closed against me. I never found that happiness which should spring from the fulfilment of a holy mission; my thoughts were far away, and the words of Clarimonde were ever upon my lips like an involuntary refrain. Oh, brother, meditate well on this! Through having but once lifted my eyes to look upon a woman, through one fault apparently so venial, I have for years remained a victim to the most miserable agonies, and the happiness of my life has been destroyed for ever.

I WILL not longer dwell upon those defeats, or on those inward victories invariably followed by yet more terrible falls, but will at once proceed to the facts of my story. One night my door-bell was long and violently rung. The aged housekeeper arose and opened to the stranger, and the figure of a man, whose complexion was deeply bronzed, and who was richly clad in a foreign costume, with a poniard at his girdle, appeared under the rays of Barbara's lantern. Her first impulse was one of terror, but the stranger reassured her, and stated that he desired to see me at once on matters relating to my holy calling. Barbara invited him upstairs, where I was on the point of retiring. The stranger told me that his mistress, a very noble lady, was lying at the point of death, and desired to see a priest. I replied that I was prepared to follow him, took with me the sacred articles necessary for extreme unction, and descended in all haste. Two horses black as the night itself stood without the gate, pawing the ground with impatience, and veiling their chests with long streams of smoky vapor exhaled from their nostrils. He held the stirrup and aided me to mount upon one; then, merely laying his hand upon the pommel of the saddle, he vaulted on the other, pressed the animal's sides with his knees, and loosened rein.

The horse bounded forward with the velocity of an arrow. Mine, of which the stranger held the bridle, also started off at a swift gallop, keeping up with his companion. We devoured the road. The ground flowed backward beneath us in a long streaked line of pale gray, and the black silhouettes of the trees seemed fleeing by us on either side like an

army in rout. We passed through a forest so profoundly gloomy that I felt my flesh creep in the chill darkness with superstitious fear. The showers of bright sparks which flew from the stony road under the iron-shod feet of our horses remained glowing in our wake like a fiery trail; and had anyone at that hour of the night beheld us both—my guide and myself—he must have taken us for two specters riding upon nightmares. Witch-fires ever and anon flitted across the road before us, and the night-birds shrieked fearsomely in the depth of the woods beyond, where we beheld at intervals glow the phosphorescent eyes of wildcats. The manes of the horses became more and more disheveled, the sweat streamed over their flanks, and their breath came through their nostrils hard and fast. But when he found them slacking pace, the guide reanimated them by uttering a strange, guttural, unearthly cry, and the gallop recommenced with fury.

At last the whirlwind race ceased; a huge black mass pierced through with many bright points of light suddenly rose before us, the hoofs of our horses echoed louder upon a strong wooden drawbridge, and we rode under a great vaulted archway which darkly yawned between two enormous towers. Some great excitement evidently reigned in the castle. Servants with torches were crossing the courtyard in every direction, and above lights were ascending and descending from landing to landing. I obtained a confused glimpse of vast masses of architecture—columns, arcades, flights of steps, stairways—a royal voluptuousness and elfin magnificence of construction worthy of fairyland. A negro page—the same who had before brought me the tablet from Clarimonde, and whom I instantly recognized—approached to aid me in dismounting, and the majordomo, attired in black velvet with a gold chain about his neck, advanced to meet me, supporting himself upon an ivory cane. Large tears were falling from his eyes and streaming over his cheeks and white beard. "Too late!" he cried, sorrowfully shaking his venerable head. "Too late, sir priest! But if you have not been able to save the soul, come at least to watch by the poor body."

He took my arm and conducted me to the death-chamber. I wept not less bitterly than he, for I had learned that the dead one was none other than that Clarimonde whom I had so deeply and so wildly loved. A prie-dieu stood at the foot of the bed; a bluish flame flickering in a bronze patera filled all the room with a wan, deceptive light, here and there bringing out in the darkness at intervals some projection of furniture or cornice. In a chiseled urn upon the table there was a faded white rose, whose leaves—excepting one that still held—had all fallen, like odorous tears, to the foot of the vase. A broken black mask, a fan, and disguises of every variety, which were lying on the armchairs, bore witness that death had entered suddenly and unannounced into that sumptuous dwelling. Without daring to cast my eyes upon the bed, I knelt down and commenced to repeat the Psalms for the Dead, with exceeding fervor, thanking God that He had placed the tomb between me and the memory of this woman, so that I might thereafter be able to utter her name in my prayers as a name for ever sanctified by death. But my fervor gradually weakened, and I fell insensibly into a revery. That chamber bore no semblance to a chamber of death. In lieu of the fetid and cadaverous odors which I had been accustomed to breathe during such funereal vigils, a languorous vapor of Oriental perfume—I know not what amorous odor of woman—softly floated through the tepid air. That pale light seemed rather a twilight gloom contrived for

voluptuous pleasure, than a substitute for the yellow-flickering watch-tapers which shine by the side of corpses. I thought upon the strange destiny which enabled me to meet Clarimonde again at the very moment when she was lost to me for ever, and a sigh of regretful anguish escaped from my breast. Then it seemed to me that someone behind me had also sighed, and I turned round to look. It was only an echo. But in that moment my eyes fell upon the bed of death which they had till then avoided. The red damask curtains, decorated with large flowers worked in embroidery and looped up with gold bullion, permitted me to behold the fair dead, lying at full length, with hands joined upon her bosom. She was covered with a linen wrapping of dazzling whiteness, which formed a strong contrast with the gloomy purple of the hangings, and was of so fine a texture that it concealed nothing of her body's charming form, and allowed the eye to follow those beautiful outlines—undulating like the neck of a swan—which even death had not robbed of their supple grace. She seemed an alabaster statue executed by some skilful sculptor to place upon the tomb of a queen, or rather, perhaps, like a slumbering maiden over whom the silent snow had woven a spotless veil.

I could no longer maintain my constrained attitude of prayer. The air of the alcove intoxicated me, that febrile perfume of half-faded roses penetrated my very brain, and I commenced to pace restlessly up and down the chamber, pausing at each turn before the bier to contemplate the graceful corpse lying beneath the transparency of its shroud. Wild fancies came thronging to my brain. I thought to myself that she might not, perhaps, be really dead; that she might only have feigned death for the purpose of bringing me to her castle, and then declaring her love. At one time I even thought I saw her foot move under the whiteness of the coverings, and slightly disarrange the long straight folds of the winding-sheet.

And then I asked myself: "Is this indeed Clarimonde? What proof have I that it is she? Might not that black page have passed into the service of some other lady? Surely, I must be going mad to torture and afflict myself thus!" But my heart answered with a fierce throbbing: "It is she; it is she indeed!" I approached the bed again, and fixed my eyes with redoubled attention upon the object of my incertitude. Ah, must I confess it? That exquisite perfection of bodily form, although purified and made sacred by the shadow of death, affected me more voluptuously than it should have done; and that repose so closely resembled slumber that one might well have mistaken it for such. I forgot that I had come there to perform a funeral ceremony; I fancied myself a young bridegroom entering the chamber of the bride, who all modestly hides her fair face, and through coyness seeks to keep herself wholly veiled.

Heartbroken with grief, yet wild with hope, shuddering at once with fear and pleasure, I bent over her and grasped the corner of the sheet. I lifted it back, holding my breath all the while through fear of waking her. My arteries throbbed with such violence that I felt them hiss through my temples, and the sweat poured from my forehead in streams, as though I had lifted a mighty slab of marble. There, indeed, lay Clarimonde, even as I had seen her at the church on the day of my ordination. She was not less charming than then. With her, death seemed but a last coquetry. The pallor of her cheeks, the less brilliant carnation of her lips, her long eyelashes lowered and relieving their dark fringe against that white skin,

lent her an unspeakably seductive aspect of melancholy chastity and mental suffering; her long loose hair, still intertwined with some little blue flowers, made a shining pillow for her head, and veiled the nudity of her shoulders with its thick ringlets; her beautiful hands, purer, more diaphanous, than the Host, were crossed on her bosom in an attitude of pious rest and silent prayer, which served to counteract all that might have proved otherwise too alluring—even after death—in the exquisite roundness and ivory polish of her bare arms from which the pearl bracelets had not yet been removed.

I remained long in mute contemplation, and the more I gazed, the less could I persuade myself that life had really abandoned that beautiful body for ever. I do not know whether it was an illusion or a reflection of the lamplight, but it seemed to me that the blood was again commencing to circulate under that lifeless pallor, although she remained all motionless. I laid my hand lightly on her arm; it was cold, but not colder than her hand on the day when it touched mine at the portals of the church. I resumed my position, bending my face above her, and bathing her cheek with the warm dew of my tears. Ah, what bitter feelings of despair and helplessness, what agonies unutterable did I endure in that long watch! Vainly did I wish that I could have gathered all my life into one mass that I might give it all to her, and breathe into her chill remains the flame which devoured me. The night advanced, and feeling the moment of eternal separation approach, I could not deny myself the last sad sweet pleasure of imprinting a kiss upon the dead lips of her who had been my only love. . . . Oh, miracle! A faint breath mingled itself with my breath, and the mouth of Clarimonde responded to the passionate pressure of mine. Her eyes unclosed, and lighted up with something of their former brilliancy; she uttered a long sigh, and uncrossing her arms, passed them around my neck with a look of ineffable delight. "Ah, it is thou, Romuald!" she murmured in a voice languishingly sweet as the last vibrations of a harp. "What ailed thee, dearest? I waited so long for thee that I am dead; but we are now betrothed: I can see thee and visit thee. Adieu, Romuald, adieu! I love thee. That is all I wished to tell thee, and I give thee back the life which thy kiss for a moment recalled. We shall soon meet again."

Her head fell back, but her arms yet encircled me, as though to retain me still. A furious whirlwind suddenly burst in the window, and entered the chamber. The last remaining leaf of the white rose for a moment palpitated at the extremity of the stalk like a butterfly's wing, then it detached itself and flew forth through the open casement, bearing with it the soul of Clarimonde. The lamp was extinguished, and I fell insensible upon the bosom of the beautiful dead.

When I came to myself again I was lying on the bed in my little room at the presbytery, and the old dog of the former curé was licking my hand, which had been hanging down outside of the covers. Barbara, all trembling with age and anxiety, was busying herself about the room, opening and shutting drawers, and emptying powders into glasses. On seeing me open my eyes, the old woman uttered a cry of joy, the dog yelped and wagged his tail, but I was still so weak that I could not speak a single word or make the slightest motion. Afterward I learned that I had lain thus for three days, giving no evidence of life beyond the faintest respiration. Those three days do not reckon in my life, nor could I ever imagine whither my spirit had departed during those three days; I

have no recollection of aught relating to them. Barbara told me that the same coppery-complexioned man who came to seek me on the night of my departure from the presbytery had brought me back the next morning in a close litter, and departed immediately afterward.

When I became able to collect my scattered thoughts, I reviewed within my mind all the circumstances of that fateful night. At first I thought I had been the victim of some magical illusion, but ere long the recollection of other circumstances, real and palpable in themselves, came to forbid that supposition. I could not believe that I had been dreaming, since Barbara as well as myself had seen the strange man with his two black horses, and described with exactness every detail of his figure and apparel. Nevertheless it appeared that none knew of any castle in the neighborhood answering to the description of that in which I had again found Clarimonde.

One morning I found the Abbé Sérapion in my room. Barbara had advised him that I was ill, and he had come with all speed to see me. Although this haste on his part testified to an affectionate interest in me, yet his visit did not cause me the pleasure which it should have done. The Abbé Sérapion had something penetrating and inquisitorial in his gaze which made me feel very ill at ease. His presence filled me with embarrassment and a sense of guilt. At the first glance he divined my interior trouble, and I hated him for his clairvoyance.

While he inquired after my health in hypocritically honeyed accents, he constantly kept his two great yellow lion-eyes fixed upon me, and plunged his look into my soul like a sounding-lead. Then he asked me how I directed my parish, if I was happy in it, how I passed the leisure hours allowed me in the intervals of pastoral duty, whether I had become acquainted with many of the inhabitants of the place, what was my favorite reading, and a thousand other such questions. I answered these inquiries as briefly as possible, and he, without ever waiting for my answers, passed rapidly from one subject of query to another. That conversation had evidently no connection with what he actually wished to say. At last, without any premonition, but as though repeating a piece of news which he had recalled on the instant, and feared might otherwise be forgotten subsequently, he suddenly said, in a clear vibrant voice, which rang in my ears like the trumpets of the Last Judgment:

"The great courtezan Clarimonde died a few days ago, at the close of an orgy which lasted eight days and eight nights. It was something infernally splendid. The abominations of the banquets of Belshazzar and Cleopatra were re-enacted there. Good God, what age are we living in? The guests were served by swarthy slaves who spoke an unknown tongue, and who seemed to me to be veritable demons. The livery of the very least among them would have served for the gala-dress of an emperor. There have always been very strange stories told of this Clarimonde, and all her lovers came to a violent or miserable end. They used to say that she was a ghoul, a female vampire; but I believe she was none other than Beelzebub himself."

He ceased to speak, and commenced to regard me more attentively than ever, as though to observe the effect of his words on me. I could not refrain from starting when I heard him utter the name of Clarimonde, and this news of her death, in addition to the pain it caused me by reason of its coincidence with the nocturnal scenes I had witnessed, filled me with an agony and terror which my face betrayed, despite my utmost endeavors to appear composed. Sérapion fixed an anxious and severe

look upon me, and then observed: "My son, I must warn you that you are standing with foot raised upon the brink of an abyss; take heed lest you fall therein. Satan's claws are long, and tombs are not always true to their trust. The tombstone of Clarimonde should be sealed down with a triple seal, for, if reports be true, it is not the first time she has died. May God watch over you, Romuald!"

And with these words the abbé walked slowly to the door. I did not see him again at that time, for he left for S——— almost immediately.

I BECAME completely restored to health and resumed my accustomed duties. The memory of Clarimonde and the words of the old abbé were constantly in my mind; nevertheless no extraordinary event had occurred to verify the funereal predictions of Sérapion, and I had commenced to believe that his fears and my own terrors were over-exaggerated, when one night I had a strange dream. I had hardly fallen asleep when I heard my bed-curtains drawn apart, as their rings slid back upon the curtain-rod with a sharp sound. I rose up quickly upon my elbow, and beheld the shadow of a woman standing erect before me. I recognized Clarimonde immediately. She bore in her hand a little lamp, shaped like those which are placed in tombs, and its light lent her fingers a rosy transparency, which extended itself by lessening degrees even to the opaque and milky whiteness of her bare arm. Her only garment was the linen winding-sheet which had shrouded her when lying upon the bed of death. She sought to gather its folds over her bosom as though ashamed of being so scantily clad, but her little hand was not equal to the task. She was so white that the color of the drapery blended with that of her flesh under the pallid rays of the lamp. Enveloped with this subtle tissue which betrayed all the contour of her body, she seemed rather the marble statue of some fair antique bather than a woman endowed with life. But dead or living, statue or woman, shadow or body, her beauty was still the same, only that the green light of her eyes was less brilliant, and her mouth, once so warmly crimson, was only tinted with a faint tender rosiness, like that of her cheeks. The little blue flowers which I had noticed entwined in her hair were withered and dry, and had lost nearly all their leaves, but this did not prevent her from being charming—so charming that, notwithstanding the strange character of the adventure, and the unexplainable manner in which she had entered my room, I felt not even for a moment the least fear.

She placed the lamp on the table and seated herself at the foot of my bed; then bending toward me, she said, in that voice at once silvery clear and yet velvety in its sweet softness, such as I never heard from any lips save hers:

"I have kept thee long in waiting, dear Romuald, and it must have seemed to thee that I had forgotten thee. But I come from afar off, very far off, and from a land whence no other has ever yet returned. There is neither sun nor moon in that land whence I come: all is but space and shadow; there is neither road nor pathway: no earth for the foot, no air for the wing; and nevertheless behold me here, for Love is stronger that Death and must conquer him in the end. Oh what sad faces and fearful things I have seen on my way hither! What difficulty my soul, returned to earth through the power of will alone, has had in finding its body and reinstating itself therein! What terrible efforts I had to make ere I could lift the ponderous slab with which they had covered me! See, the palms of my poor hands are all bruised! Kiss them, sweet love,

that they may be healed!" She laid the cold palms of her hands upon my mouth, one after the other. I kissed them, indeed, many times, and she the while watched me with a smile of ineffable affection.

I confess, to my shame, that I had entirely forgotten the advice of the Abbé Sérapion and the sacred office wherewith I had been invested. I had fallen without resistance, and at the first assault. I had not even made the least effort to repel the tempter. The fresh coolness of Clarimonde's skin penetrated my own, and I felt voluptuous tremors pass over my whole body. Poor child! in spite of all I saw afterward, I can hardly yet believe she was a demon; at least she had no appearance of being such, and never did Satan so skilfully conceal his claws and horns. She had drawn her feet up beneath her, and squatted down on the edge of the couch in an attitude full of negligent coquetry. From time to time she passed her little hand through my hair and twisted it into curls, as though trying how a new style of wearing it would become my face. I abandoned myself to her hands with the most guilty pleasure, while she accompanied her gentle play with the prettiest prattle. The most remarkable fact was that I felt no astonishment whatever at so extraordinary an adventure, and as in dreams one finds no difficulty in accepting the most fantastic events as simple facts, so all these circumstances seemed to me perfectly natural in themselves.

"I loved thee long ere I saw thee, dear Romuald, and sought thee everywhere. Thou wast my dream, and I first saw thee in the church at the fatal moment. I said at once, 'It is he!' I gave thee a look into which I threw all the love I ever had, all the love I now have, all the love I shall ever have for thee—a look that would have damned a cardinal or brought a king to his knees at my feet in view of all his court. Thou remainedst unmoved, preferring thy God to me!

"Ah, how jealous I am of that God whom thou didst love and still lovest more than me!

"Wo is me, unhappy one that I am! I can never have thy heart all to myself, I whom thou didst recall to life with a kiss—dead Clarimonde, who for thy sake bursts asunder the gates of the tomb, and comes to consecrate to thee a life which she has resumed only to make thee happy!"

All her words were accompanied with the most impassioned caresses, which bewildered my sense and my reason to such an extent that I did not fear to utter a frightful blasphemy for the sake of consoling her, and to declare that I loved her as much as God.

Her eyes rekindled and shone like chrysoprases. "In truth?—in very truth?—as much as God!" she cried, flinging her beautiful arms around me. "Since it is so, thou wilt come with me; thou wilt follow me whithersoever I desire. Thou wilt cast away thy ugly black habit. Thou shalt be the proudest and most envied of cavaliers; thou shalt be my lover! To be the acknowledged lover of Clarimonde, who has refused even a pope! That will be something to feel proud of. Ah, the fair, unspeakably happy existence, the beautiful golden life we shall live together! And when shall we depart, my fair sir?"

"Tomorrow! Tomorrow!" I cried in my delirium.

"Tomorrow, then, so let it be!" she answered. "In the meanwhile I shall have opportunity to change my toilet, for this is a little too light and in nowise suited for a voyage. I must also forthwith notify all my friends who believe me dead, and mourn for me as deeply as they are capable of doing. The money, the dresses, the carriage—all will be ready. I shall call for thee at this same hour. Adieu, dear heart!" And she lightly touched my forehead

with her lips. The lamp went out, the curtains closed again, and all became dark; a leaden, dreamless sleep fell on me and held me unconscious until the morning following.

I AWOKE later than usual, and the recollection of this singular adventure troubled me during the whole day. I finally persuaded myself that it was a mere vapor of my heated imagination. Nevertheless its sensations had been so vivid that it was difficult to persuade myself that they were not real, and it was not without some presentiment of what was going to happen that I got into bed at last, after having prayed God to drive far from me all thoughts of evil, and to protect the chastity of my slumber.

I soon fell into a deep sleep, and my dream was continued. The curtains again parted, and I beheld Clarimonde, not as on the former occasion, pale in her pale winding-sheet, with the violets of death upon her cheeks, but gay, sprightly, jaunty, in a superb traveling-dress of green velvet, trimmed with gold lace, and looped up on either side to allow a glimpse of satin petticoat. Her blond hair escaped in thick ringlets from beneath a broad black felt hat, decorated with white feathers whimsically twisted into various shapes. In one hand she held a little riding-whip terminated by a golden whistle. She tapped me lightly with it, and exclaimed: "Well, my fine sleeper, is this the way you make your preparations? I thought I would find you up and dressed. Arise quickly, we have no time to lose."

I leaped out of bed at once.

"Come, dress yourself, and let us go," she continued, pointing to a little package she had brought with her. "The horses are becoming impatient of delay and champing their bits at the door. We ought to have been by this time at least ten leagues distant from here."

I dressed myself hurriedly, and she handed me the articles of apparel herself one by one, bursting into laughter from time to time at my awkwardness, as she explained to me the use of a garment when I had made a mistake. She hurriedly arranged my hair, and this done, held up before me a little pocket-mirror of Venetian crystal, rimmed with silver filigree-work, and playfully asked: "How dost find thyself now? Wilt engage me for thy valet?"

I was no longer the same person, and I could not even recognize myself. I resembled my former self no more than a finished statue resembles a block of stone. My old face seemed but a coarse daub of the one reflected in the mirror. I was handsome, and my vanity was sensibly tickled by the metamorphosis. That elegant apparel, that richly embroidered vest had made of me a totally different personage, and I marveled at the power of transformation owned by a few yards of cloth cut after a certain pattern. The spirit of my costume penetrated my very skin and within ten minutes more I had become something of a coxcomb.

In order to feel more at ease in my new attire, I took several turns up and down the room. Clarimonde watched me with an air of maternal pleasure, and appeared well satisfied with her work. "Come, enough of this child's play! Let us start, Romuald, dear. We have far to go, and we may not get there in time." She took my hand and led me forth. All the doors opened before her at a touch, and we passed by the dog without awaking him.

At the gate we found Margheritone waiting, the same swarthy groom who had once before been my escort. He held the bridles of three horses, all black like those which bore us to the castle—one for me, one for him, one for Clarimonde. These horses must have been Spanish genets born of mares fecundated by a zephyr, for they were fleet as the wind itself, and

the moon, which had just risen at our departure to light us on the way, rolled over the sky like a wheel detached from her own chariot. We beheld her on the right leaping from tree to tree, and putting herself out of breath in the effort to keep up with us. Soon we came upon a level plain where, hard by a clump of trees, a carriage with four vigorous horses awaited us. We entered it, and the postillions urged their animals into a mad gallop. I had one arm around Clarimonde's waist, and one of her hands clasped in mine; her head leaned upon my shoulder, and I felt her bosom, half bare, lightly pressing against my arm. I had never known such intense happiness. In that hour I had forgotten everything, and I no more remembered having ever been a priest, so great was the fascination which the evil spirit exerted upon me.

From that night my nature seemed in some sort to have become halved, and there were two men within me, neither of whom knew the other. At one moment I believed myself a priest who dreamed nightly that he was a gentleman, at another that I was a gentleman who dreamed he was a priest. I could no longer distinguish the dream from the reality, nor could I discover where the reality began or where ended the dream. The exquisite young lord and libertine railed at the priest, the priest loathed the dissolute habits of the young lord. Two spirals entangled and confounded the one with the other, yet never touching, would afford a fair representation of this bicephalic life which I lived. Despite the strange character of my condition, I do not believe that I ever inclined, even for a moment, to madness. I always retained with extreme vividness all the perceptions of my two lives. Only there was one absurd fact which I could not explain to myself—namely, that the consciousness of the same individuality existed in two men so opposite in character. It was an anomaly for which I could not account—whether I believed myself to be the curé of the little village of C———, or *Il Signor Romualdo,* the titled lover of Clarimonde.

Be that as it may, I lived, at least I believed that I lived, in Venice. I have never been able to discover rightly how much of illusion and how much of reality there was in this fantastic adventure. We dwelt in a great palace on the Canaleio, filled with frescoes and statues, and containing two Titians in the noblest style of the great master, which were hung in Clarimonde's chamber. It was a palace well worthy of a king. We had each our gondola, our *barcarolli* in family livery, our music hall, and our special poet. Clarimonde always lived upon a magnificent scale; there was something of Cleopatra in her nature. As for me, I had the retinue of a prince's son, and I was regarded with as much reverential respect as though I had been of the family of one of the twelve Apostles or the four Evangelists of the Most Serene Republic. I would not have turned aside to allow even the Doge to pass, and I do not believe that since Satan fell from heaven, any creature was ever prouder or more insolent than I. I went to the Ridotto, and played with a luck which seemed absolutely infernal. I received the best of all society—the sons of ruined families, women of the theater, shrewd knaves, parasites, hectoring swashbucklers. But notwithstanding the dissipation of such a life, I always remained faithful to Clarimonde. I loved her wildly. She would have excited satiety itself, and chained inconstancy. To have Clarimonde was to have twenty mistresses; ay, to possess all women: so mobile, so varied of aspect, so fresh in new charms was she all in herself—a very chameleon of a woman, in sooth. She donned to perfection the character, the attrac-

tion, the style of beauty of any woman who appeared to please you. She returned my love a hundred-fold, and it was in vain that the young patricians and even the Ancients of the Council of Ten made her the most magnificent proposals. A Foscari even went so far as to offer to espouse her. She rejected all his overtures. Of gold she had enough. She wished no longer for anything but love—a love youthful, pure, evoked by herself, and which should be a first and last passion. I would have been perfectly happy but for a cursed nightmare which recurred every night, and in which I believed myself to be a poor village curé, practising mortification and penance for my excesses during the day. Reassured by my constant association with her, I never thought further of the strange manner in which I had become acquainted with Clarimonde. But the words of the Abbé Sérapion concerning her recurred often to my memory, and never ceased to cause me uneasiness.

For some time the health of Clarimonde had not been so good as usual; her complexion grew paler day by day. The physicians who were summoned could not comprehend the nature of her malady and knew not how to treat it. They all prescribed some insignificant remedies, and never called a second time. Her paleness, nevertheless, visibly increased, and she became colder and colder, until she seemed almost as white and dead as upon that memorable night in the unknown castle. I grieved with anguish unspeakable to behold her thus slowly perishing; and she, touched by my agony, smiled upon me sweetly and sadly with the fateful smile of those who feel that they must die.

One morning I was seated at her bedside, and breakfasting from a little table placed close at hand, so that I might not be obliged to leave her for a single instant. In the act of cutting some fruit I accidentally inflicted rather a deep gash on my finger. The blood immediately gushed forth in a little purple jet, and a few drops spurted upon Clarimonde. Her eyes flashed, her face suddenly assumed an expression of savage and ferocious joy such as I had never before observed in her. She leaped out of her bed with animal agility—the agility, as it were, of an ape or a cat—and sprang upon my wound, which she commenced to suck with an air of unutterable pleasure. She swallowed the blood in little mouthfuls, slowly and carefully, like a connoisseur tasting a wine from Xeres or Syracuse. Gradually her eyelids half closed, and the pupils of her green eyes became oblong instead of round. From time to time she paused in order to kiss my hand, then she would recommence to press her lips to the lips of the wound in order to coax forth a few more ruddy drops. When she found that the blood would no longer come, she arose with eyes liquid and brilliant, rosier than a May dawn; her face full and fresh, her hand warm and moist—in fine, more beautiful than ever, and in the most perfect health.

"I shall not die! I shall not die!" she cried, clinging to my neck, half mad with joy. "I can love thee yet for a long time. My life is thine, and all that is of me comes from thee. A few drops of thy rich and noble blood, more precious and more potent than all the elixirs of the earth, have given me back life."

This scene long haunted my memory, and inspired me with strange doubts in regard to Clarimonde; and the same evening, when slumber had transported me to my presbytery, I beheld the Abbé Sérapion, graver and more anxious of aspect than ever. He gazed attentively at me, and sorrowfully exclaimed: "Not content with losing your soul, you now desire also to lose your body. Wretched

young man, into how terrible a plight have you fallen!" The tone in which he uttered these words powerfully affected me, but in spite of its vividness even that impression was soon dissipated, and a thousand other cares erased it from my mind.

At last one evening, while looking into a mirror whose traitorous position she had not taken into account, I saw Clarimonde in the act of emptying a powder into the cup of spiced wine which she had long been in the habit of preparing after our repasts. I took the cup, feigned to carry it to my lips, and then placed it on the nearest article of furniture as though intending to finish it at my leisure. Taking advantage of a moment when the fair one's back was turned, I threw the contents under the table, after which I retired to my chamber and went to bed, fully resolved not to sleep, but to watch and discover what should come of all this mystery. I did not have to wait long. Clarimonde entered in her nightdress, and having removed her apparel, crept into bed and lay down beside me. When she felt assured that I was asleep, she bared my arm, and drawing a gold pin from her hair, commenced to murmur in a low voice:

"One drop, only one drop! One ruby at the end of my needle. . . . Since thou lovest me yet, I must not die! . . . Ah, poor love! His beautiful blood, so brightly purple, I must drink it. Sleep, my only treasure! Sleep, my god, my child! I will do thee no harm; I will only take of thy life what I must to keep my own from being for ever extinguished. But that I love thee so much, I could well resolve to have other lovers whose veins I could drain; but since I have known thee all other men have become hateful to me. . . . Ah, the beautiful arm! How round it is! How white it is! How shall I ever dare to prick this pretty blue vein!" And while thus murmuring to herself she wept, and I felt her tears raining on my arm as she clasped it with her hands. At last she took the resolve, slightly punctured me with her pin, and commenced to suck up the blood which oozed from the place. Although she swallowed only a few drops, the fear of weakening me soon seized her, and she carefully tied a little band around my arm, afterward rubbing the wound with an unguent which immediately cicatrized it.

Further doubts were impossible. The Abbé Sérapion was right. Notwithstanding this positive knowledge, however, I could not cease to love Clarimonde, and I would gladly of my own accord have given her all the blood she required to sustain her factitious life. Moreover, I felt but little fear of her. The woman seemed to plead with me for the vampire, and what I had already heard and seen sufficed to reassure me completely. In those days I had plenteous veins, which would not have been so easily exhausted as at present; and I would not have thought of bargaining for my blood, drop by drop. I would rather have opened myself the veins of my arm and said to her: "Drink, and may my love infiltrate itself throughout thy body together with my blood!" I carefully avoided ever making the least reference to the narcotic drink she had prepared for me, or to the incident of the pin, and we lived in the most perfect harmony.

Yet my priestly scruples commenced to torment me more than ever, and I was at a loss to imagine what new penance I could invent to mortify and subdue my flesh. Although these visions were involuntary, and though I did not actually participate in anything relating to them, I could not dare to touch the body of Christ with hands so impure and a mind defiled by such debauches whether real or imaginary. In the effort to avoid falling under the influence of these wearisome hallucinations, I strove to prevent myself

from being overcome by sleep. I held my eyelids open with my fingers, and stood for hours together leaning upright against the wall, fighting sleep with all my might; but the dust of drowsiness invariably gathered upon my eyes at last, and finding all resistance useless, I would have to let my arms fall in the extremity of despairing weariness, and the current of slumber would again bear me away to the perfidious shores.

Sérapion addressed me with the most vehement exhortations, severely reproaching me for my softness and want of fervor. Finally, one day when I was more wretched than usual, he said to me: "There is but one way by which you can obtain relief from this continual torment, and though it is an extreme measure it must be made use of; violent diseases require violent remedies. I know where Clarimonde is buried. It is necessary that we shall disinter her remains, and that you shall behold in how pitiable a state the object of your love is. Then you will no longer be tempted to lose your soul for the sake of an unclean corpse devoured by worms, and ready to crumble into dust. That will assuredly restore you to yourself." For my part, I was so tired of this double life that I at once consented, desiring to ascertain beyond a doubt whether a priest or a gentleman had been the victim of delusion. I had become fully resolved either to kill one of the two men within me for the benefit of the other, or else to kill both, for so terrible an existence could not last long and be endured.

The Abbé Sérapion provided himself with a mattock, a lever, and a lantern, and at midnight we wended our way to the cemetery of ———, the location and place of which were perfectly familiar to him. After having directed the rays of the dark lantern upon the inscriptions of several tombs, we came at last upon a great slab, half concealed by huge weeds and devoured by mosses and parasitic plants, whereupon we deciphered the opening lines of the epitaph:

Ici gît Clarimonde
Qui fut de son vivant
*La plus belle du monde.**

"It is here without doubt," muttered Sérapion, and placing his lantern on the ground, he forced the point of the lever under the edge of the stone and commenced to raise it. The stone yielded, and he proceeded to work with the mattock. Darker and more silent than the night itself, I stood by and watched him do it, while he, bending over his dismal toil, streamed with sweat, panted, and his hard-coming breath seemed to have the harsh tone of a death rattle. It was a weird scene, and had any persons from without beheld us, they would assuredly have taken us rather for profane wretches and shroud-stealers than for priests of God. There was something grim and fierce in Sérapion's zeal which lent him the air of a demon rather than of an apostle or an angel, and his great aquiline face, with all its stern features brought out in strong relief by the lantern-light, had something fearsome in it which enhanced the unpleasant fancy. I felt an icy sweat come out upon my forehead in huge beads, and my hair stood up with a hideous fear. Within the depths of my own heart I felt that the act of the austere Sérapion was an abominable sacrilege; and I could have prayed that a triangle of fire would issue from the entrails of the dark clouds, heavily rolling above us, to reduce him to cinders. The owls which had been nestling in the cypress-trees, startled by the gleam of the lantern, flew against it from time to time, striking their dusky wings against its panes, and uttering

*Here lies Clarimonde
Who was famed in her life-time
As the fairest of women.

plaintive cries of lamentation; wild foxes yelped in the far darkness, and a thousand sinister noises detached themselves from the silence.

At last Sérapion's mattock struck the coffin itself, making its planks re-echo with a deep sonorous sound, with that terrible sound nothingness utters when stricken. He wrenched apart and tore up the lid, and I beheld Clarimonde, pallid as a figure of marble, with hands joined; her white winding-sheet made but one fold from her head to her feet. A little crimson drop sparkled like a speck of dew at one corner of her colorless mouth. Sérapion, at this spectacle, burst into fury: "Ah, thou art here, demon! Impure courtezan! Drinker of blood and gold!" And he flung holy water upon the corpse and the coffin, over which he traced the sign of the cross with his sprinkler. Poor Clarimonde had no sooner been touched by the blessed spray than her beautiful body crumbled into dust, and became only a shapeless and frightful mass of cinders and half-calcined bones.

"Behold your mistress, my Lord Romuald!" cried the inexorable priest, as he pointed to these sad remains. "Will you be easily tempted after this to promenade on the Lido or at Fusina with your beauty?"

I covered my face with my hands; a vast ruin had taken place within me. I returned to my presbytery, and the noble Lord Romuald, the lover of Clarimonde, separated himself from the poor priest with whom he had kept such strange company so long. But once only, the following night, I saw Clarimonde. She said to me, as she had said the first time at the portals of the church: "Unhappy man! Unhappy man! What hast thou done? Wherefore have harkened to that imbecile priest? Wert thou not happy? And what harm had I ever done thee that thou shouldst violate my poor tomb, and lay bare the miseries of my nothingness? All communication between our souls and our bodies is henceforth for ever broken. Adieu! Thou wilt yet regret me!" She vanished in air as smoke, and I never saw her more.

Alas! she spoke truly indeed. I have regretted her more than once, and I regret her still. My soul's peace has been very dearly bought. The love of God was not too much to replace such a love as hers. And this, brother, is the story of my youth. Never gaze upon a woman, and walk abroad only with eyes ever fixed upon the ground; for however chaste and watchful one may be, the error of a single moment is enough to make one lose eternity.

WHAT constitutes a "weird tale"? This question is answered so clearly and succinctly in a personal letter to the editor from H. P. Lovecraft, author of *The Call of Cthulhu* in this issue, that we can not forebear quoting him, although the letter is really an explanation of his own stories rather than a general discussion of the "weird tale."

"All my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large," writes Mr. Lovecraft. "To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form—and the local human passions and conditions and standards—are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all. Only the human senses and characters have human qualities. *These* must be handled with unsparing *realism* (*not* catchpenny *romanticism*), but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown—the shadow-haunted *Outside*—we must remember to leave our humanity and terrestrialism at the threshold.

"If I were writing an 'interplanetary' tale it would deal with beings organized very differently from mundane mammalia, and obeying motives wholly alien to anything we know upon Earth—the exact degree of alienage depending, of course, on the scene of the tale; whether laid in the solar system, or the *utterly unplumbed* gulfs still farther out—the nameless vortices of never-dreamed-of strangeness, where form and symmetry, light and heat, even matter and energy themselves, may be unthinkably metamorphosed or totally wanting. I have merely got at the edge of this in '*Cthulhu*,' where I have been careful to avoid terrestrialism in the few linguistic and nomenclatural specimens from Outside which I present. All very well—but will the readers stand for it? That's all they're likely to get from me in the future—except when I deal with definitely terrestrial scenes."

The popularity of Lovecraft's stories in WEIRD TALES seems to provide a definite answer to his question, "Will the readers stand for it?" And when he has departed most widely from human motives and standards, as in *The Outsider*, he has attained the greatest favor with you, the readers of this magazine. It is such wholly unearthly standards that made the charm of Donald Wandrei's *The Red Brain*, in last October's WEIRD TALES; it is the utter strangeness and unterrestrialism of *The Space-Eaters*, by Frank Belknap Long, Jr. (shortly to be published), that give this story its gripping horror and fascination.

Clark Ashton Smith's unusual poem, *The Saturnienne*, has made a real hit with you, the readers, judging by the enthusiastic comment it has evoked.

"*The Saturnienne* is a masterpiece of its kind," writes Charles M. Walker, of Federalsburg, Maryland. "This poem is grotesque and unique, to say the least, and I would like to read more of this man's work."

"I read Clark Ashton Smith's bit of verse with delight," writes August W. Derleth, of Madison, Wisconsin. "I hope you run more of his poetry."

"WEIRD TALES appeals to me because it is different," writes M. Artine Miller, of Pine Ridge, Oregon. "I can always rely upon finding at least one entirely different story from any I have ever read. Long life and much success to WEIRD TALES."

Writes J. T. Ballew, of Newport News, Virginia: "For some time I have been a constant reader of WEIRD TALES, and find it the most interesting magazine on the market. Am casting my first vote, on stories in the December issue, for *The Time-Raider;* second, for *The Infidel's Daughter;* third, *The Devils of Po Sung.*"

A joint letter, from "six California readers who are thrilled by your magazine," asks for more variety. "The historical weird story seems to be forgotten," write these readers from Los Angeles. "Did you ever have stories submitted with Napoleon or Washington or Cæsar as a ghost? Why not? These might be quite instructive at the same time, and remind us of historical events which we have forgotten since our school days. Too many of your newer writers seem to imitate Lovecraft, who is unique in his eery tales. Anybody trying to wield Lovecraft's thunder appears ridiculous. His tales can not be beaten for weirdness."

"*The Time-Raider* is one of the best serials that ever ran in your magazine," writes Ralph McCormack, of Ashland, Oregon. "Stories of thousands of years in the future are always interesting. I like this story much better than *The Time Machine* by that famous English author, H. G. Wells; he had the people of the future fragile, small creatures, and very timid. The people in his story were much worse off than we are now, and didn't know much about science. It seems to me that people would be very much more scientific in the future, as they are in Edmond Hamilton's serial in WEIRD TALES. I hope that you will publish more stories like *The Time-Raider*. In your De-

cember issue, I liked especially the man-eating orchids in *The Devils of Po Sung*. That was a great story."

"I am still avidly devouring W. T.," writes Lillia Price Savino, of Portsmouth, Virginia. "The stories are mostly good, some of them splendid, and I like them all; but I would like to see the illustrations more modestly done. My little daughter hides them in the bookcase when her boy friends call. A man to whom I recommended the magazine said he never bought a copy because of the glaring covers which gave the impression of a trashy affair; but when I told him Victor Rousseau was a regular contributor he seized upon it, and I do not think he ever misses a copy now. He is crazy over H. G. Wells, too, and Seabury Quinn, both of whom are WEIRD TALES writers. Well, it remains my favorite magazine, and I take a good many."

Nictzin Dyalhis writes from Columbus, Ohio: "Just looked over a copy of the December number. Must say that E. Hoffmann Price, with *The Infidel's Daughter*, is good. Also, I think that Rankin turns out the best-looking cover, so far as workmanship goes, that ever graced a WEIRD TALES magazine issue. He seems to have genuine imagination and the ability to express it creatively."

Readers, your favorite stories in the December issue, as shown by your votes, are *The Infidel's Daughter*, by E. Hoffmann Price; part third of *The Time-Raider*, by Edmond Hamilton; and *The Devils of Po Sung*, by Bassett Morgan. What is your favorite story in this issue? It will help us to keep the magazine in accord with your wishes if you will let us know which stories you like best; and which stories you dislike, if any.

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The Shadow On the Moor

(Continued from page 187)

flashed fire in the light and glistened evilly before his eyes. Fascinated, Jarvais watched the shadowy arm lift the crescent blade point-foremost toward the moon, hold it still, then lift it again, now hilt foremost, holding it quivering high in the air. Down came the mighty arm toward Jarvais' chest. He saw it begin slowly—oh so slowly—down, on down—nearer——. Then the moon set, and all was blackness and stillness on the moor.

[*From a London paper*]

Noted Novelist Disappears

The mysterious disappearance of Gerald Jarvais, one of England's most noted authors, has caused one of the biggest sensations of the day. Mr. Jarvais was spending a week-end at Humbledon on the moors. According to Edward Johnson, the innkeeper, Mr. Jarvais had sat in the main room of the inn until late, and then gone to his room. From there he disappeared. His bed had not been slept in, nor had he undressed for the night. Mr. Jarvais had no enemies, and the police are unable to find a clue to his whereabouts.

This is the second tragedy of the kind in the little town in as many months. The old wives of the village whisper of strange things on the moor, and say that Jarvais and Gilbert, the man found murdered last month, knew too much about the ruins on the moor. However, the police laugh at such ideas and believe that Mr. Jarvais was a victim of foul play. The Authors' League has offered a reward of a thousand pounds for information as to his whereabouts.

Watch for

"THE BAT-MEN OF THORIUM"

By BERTRAM RUSSELL

A startling weird-scientific story

The Call of Cthulhu

(Continued from page 178)

voyage back home to the old house by the Egeberg. He could not tell—they would think him mad. He would write of what he knew before death came, but his wife must not guess. Death would be a boon if only it could blot out the memories.

That was the document I read, and now I have placed it in the tin box beside the bas-relief and the papers of Professor Angell. With it shall go this record of mine—this test of my own sanity, wherein is pieced together that which I hope may never be pieced together again. I have looked upon all that the universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me. But I do not think my life will be long. As my uncle went, as poor Johansen went, so I shall go. I know too much, and the cult still lives.

Cthulhu still lives, too, I suppose, again in that chasm of stone which has shielded him since the sun was young. His accursed city is sunken once more, for the *Vigilant* sailed over the spot after the April storm; but his ministers on earth still bellow and prance and slay around idol-capped monoliths in lonely places. He must have been trapped by the sinking whilst within his black abyss, or else the world would by now be screaming with fright and frenzy. Who knows the end? What has risen may sink, and what has sunk may rise. Loathsomeness waits and dreams in the deep, and decay spreads over the tottering cities of men. A time will come—but I must not and can not think! Let me pray that, if I do not survive this manuscript, my executors may put caution before audacity and see that it meets no other eye.

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Next Month

The Strange People

By MURRAY LEINSTER

A WEIRD secret, a revolting, gruesome mystery, surrounded the Strange People. They kept their eery secret well, but the horror of it weighed terribly upon them, and they freely chose death to the alternative of having their secret found out.

CUNNINGHAM found himself caught in the toils of intrigue and mystery among a people who murdered in defense of their terrible secret; found himself in love with a girl of the Strange People; faced their flashing knives and fierce hatred, only to learn that he would be slain if he returned again, as a precaution against the finding out of their fearful secret.

BRAVING the dark intrigues of Vladimir, who swears that he will make the Strange People kiss the dust under his feet (because of his knowledge of their secret), Cunningham goes again into the mountains, and is captured by the Strangers. The exciting denouement, the weird adventures, and the dramatic revelation of the frightful secret, make a mystery story of eery thrills and fascinating interest. It will begin in the

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The Ghost-Table

(Continued from page 158)

ceased when we switched on the lights. But too late. He was dead.

"We never knew whether the impact of the table killed him, or whether he was dead before the table touched him. A medical certificate was made, giving heart failure as the cause: for the less said about such matters the better.

"I resumed possession of the table," continued the dealer, "but every night about 12, that table began its antics. That sort of thing went on for weeks, ever increasing in violence. I sold it to you, thinking that you—since you didn't know its history and your house was in no way connected with the foregoing events—might put a stop to such unbelievable performances."

"I see your line of thought," I replied, "but it didn't work out that way, unfortunately. And my house, thanks to your fraud, is a wreck. And fraud it is, for you represented it to be a table, and not a saber-toothed tiger."

"Quite right, sir," he answered contritely. "And I assure you——"

"By the way," interrupted Paul, "what brought you here at this time?"

"The police . . . you told them of the table night before last. They naturally investigated my shop and questioned me about the table, thinking some collector had followed it from the shop to this house. So I knew it was up to its old tricks."

"Now," I queried, "what are you going to do with it? You've bought it back from me; so I can't follow my inclination to chop it up and burn it."

"Neither can I," declared the dealer. "For if I did, I'd feel I had assassinated Professor Percival. So I'll keep it chained up in a brightly lighted room."

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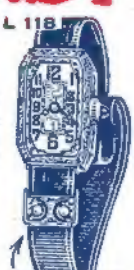

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